

## **ABSTRACT**

KNIGHT, CHRISTOPHER RYAN. A Qualitative Case Study of How Community Colleges Undertake Transformational Change to Build Institutional Capacity and Increase Student Success. (Under the direction of Dr. Audrey J. Jaeger).

Community colleges are commonly called on to change, but this demand for change is even more prescient today given the stark reality of increasing economic inequality and declining social mobility. To address these challenges while implementing institutional and regional reform in areas such as career and college readiness, developmental education reform, guided pathways implementation, college transfer, and labor market alignment entails undertaking transformational change. Yet all too often, these areas for reform are approached as independent initiatives instead of opportunities for whole-college change. In this dissertation, I present findings from a multi-site case study examining how transformational change occurs at community colleges, as well as how sensemaking manifests among senior leaders and campus members alike. Using Kezar and Eckel's theory of transformational change, I examine the interplay of key strategies facilitating transformational change, along with the role sensemaking plays during the change process. My study validated Kezar and Eckel's theory of transformational change, and found that community colleges see transformational change when they adopt a culture of student success, use data to guide their efforts, center on equity, commit to continuous improvement, and ensure representation across the college during the change process. Further, transformational change benefits from having the same president or chancellor lead the change process, which needs to engage the whole college (or district) throughout.

A Qualitative Case Study of How Community Colleges Undertake Transformational Change to  
Build Institutional Capacity and Increase Student Success

by  
Christopher Ryan Knight

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
North Carolina State University  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Educational Research and Policy Analysis

Raleigh, North Carolina

2021

APPROVED BY:

---

Audrey J. Jaeger, Ph.D.  
Chair of Advisory Committee

---

Robert G. Templin, Ed.D.

---

Kenneth Ender, Ph.D.

---

Anna J. Egalite, Ph.D.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Christopher Ryan Knight currently works as Associate Director of Network Recruitment and Retention at Achieving the Dream, a nonprofit network of over 300 community colleges dedicated to equity and student success. In this role, he supports colleges as they join ATD and through their first years in the Network, develops webinars and presidents' affinity group meetings, and works with colleges on selecting services for each year.

Ryan began his career as an English instructor at Randolph Community College in Asheboro, NC, where he taught composition, business writing, literature, and college success courses. While completing his graduate coursework, he served as Lead Program Associate for Envisioning Excellence for Community College Leadership, which redesigned NC State University's educational doctorate in community college leadership to focus on key leadership capacities needed for students to be successful. Ryan wrote much of the grant proposal that evolved Envisioning Excellence into the Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research, which focuses on training presidents and trustees, as well as conducting and delivering actionable research for community colleges.

Ryan holds bachelor's and master's degrees in English.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Long and winding has been the road to this point, where after six years I am concluding my doctoral studies and submitting my “damn dissertation,” as one retired community college president called it every time he saw me and asked after my progress. Acknowledgements are in order to express my unending gratitude.

To my fellow graduate students at NC State University: Dr. Greg King, Dr. Katie Johnson, Dr. Heidi McCann, Dr. Lauren Pellegrino, Dr. Yolanda Wilson, Dr. Douglas Hummer, Lois Douglass, Dr. Jemilia Davis, Dr. Angelina Knies, Dr. Andrea DeSantis, and Haruna Suzuki. Special thanks to Jairo McMican, who inspires me with his brilliance, wit, humor, and passion for the work we do everyday. Special thanks as well to Dr. Sarah Deal, an exceptional colleague and dear friend who kept me going at a critical juncture in my life.

To the Adult, Workforce, & Continuing Professional Education graduate faculty at NC State: thank you for treating me as a peer in our work with Envisioning Excellence for Community College Leadership and later the Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research while I was also studying under you. Thanks as well to numerous presidents and other advisory board members: Dr. Keith Witham, Josh Wyner, Dr. Mary Rittling, Dr. Eduardo Padrón, Dr. Steve Scott, Dr. William Ingram, Cynthia Liston, Dr. Lisa Chapman, and Dr. Gary Green.

To my colleagues at Randolph Community College (Asheboro, NC), particularly President Robert Shackelford, Cameron Parker, Deana Allman, Devin Sova, Grey Lane, Joshua Brown, Dorothy Hans, Shane Bryson, Clark Adams, Dolores de Haro, Dacia Murphy, Todd Thompson, Stephanie Needham, Kimberly Maddox, and Don Ashley. Some of these fine folks are still going strong and steady at Randolph, while others have moved on to other places. But

everyone here was so welcoming and encouraged me as I found my passion for community colleges.

To the entire Achieving the Dream staff, present and past: my sincere thanks: President Karen Stout, Dr. Monica Parrish Trent, Bonita Brown, Susan Mayer, Carol Lincoln, Cynthia Lopez, Urysha Moseley, Kelli Bryant, H. Leon Hill, Jonathan Iuzzini, Laurie Heacock, Dr. Devora Shamah, Dr. Mei-Yen Ireland, Julia Lawton, Meredith Archer Hatch, Yu Sun, Ambre Reed, Destineé Mitchell, Leah Saliter, and Glenn Fee. Thanks as well to Dr. Desiree Zerquera, who works with ATD as a data coach and taught me some of the most important components of qualitative research in thirty minutes.

I'm deeply grateful to my committee members for invaluable input and helping me see this study through. Dr. Anna Egalite, thank you for your kindness and time teaching me the ins and outs of quantitative research, education policy, and conducting a thorough literature review. Dr. Ken Ender, thank you for cutting to the chase and keeping me focused on what's most important. Dr. Robert Templin, thank you for mentoring me and training me to look well into the future and start making the shifts now that are needed to reach that future prepared. Dr. Audrey Jaeger, thank you for endless opportunities to grow, broadening my network, and overseeing this study.

I've traversed these years with the support of some amazing friends: Douglas Price, Dr. Michael Hickman, David Weischedel, Michael Ross, Allyn Lyttle, Alexandra Barylski, Joseph Dickinson III, Natasha Menon, Kate and Zach Young, Connor Bryant, Jordan Willis, Taylor Coble, Jose Badillo, and Thomas Donahue.

Finally, eternal gratitude to my family. To Karen Knight, my mother: thank you for loving me unconditionally and always being there for me. To Kenneth Knight, my father: it's for

the best that we no longer speak, but I wish you well. To my late grandparents, Gregory and Nancy Bissett: your example of hard work and devotion to family drives me every day. To Emily, Christian, and Hope: I cherish being your dad, love you, and am always here for you. And to Beth: always, absolutely, only you, in this life and the next.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	vii
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	1
Key Areas for Reform.....	5
Essential Institutional Capacities.....	11
Overview and Significance of Study.....	15
Conclusion.....	18
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review</b> .....	19
Theoretical Framework.....	20
Literature Review Methods.....	23
Literature Review Findings.....	27
Focus of Study.....	47
Summary.....	48
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology</b> .....	50
Methodology.....	51
Positionality.....	62
Limitations.....	64
Conclusion.....	66
<b>Chapter 4: Results</b> .....	69
Overview of Participating Colleges and Their Student Outcomes.....	69
Indian River State College (FL) .....	73
Pierce College Ft. Steilacoom (WA) .....	84
Kingsborough Community College (NY) .....	96
Conclusion.....	110
<b>Chapter 5: Findings, Implications, and Conclusion</b> .....	113
Operationalizing Transformational Change at Community Colleges.....	113
Sensemaking amid Transformational Change.....	117
How Strategies for Transformational Change Interweave.....	124
Why Transformational Change Happens at Community Colleges.....	124
Implications for the Fields.....	137
Areas for Future Research.....	141
Conclusion.....	143
REFERENCES .....	144

**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 4.1	Comparison of Three Research Sites.....	70
Table 4.2	Three Year Graduation Rate Changes (2012-2014 Cohorts).....	71

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Community colleges are unique institutions of higher education, as their mission, operations, and programmatic offerings continually change to meet the needs of their communities (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013). Now well into the twenty-first century, community colleges continue to adapt their services to their communities while also taking on long-overdue issues like teaching and learning as well as equity, all while working to improve data capacity to promote evidence-based or data-driven decision making (Wyner, 2014). Coordinating all of these current efforts to improve effectiveness, communication, and collaboration is a process that entails transformational change, through which entire colleges become unified and aligned in their efforts to build institutional capacity and improve student success. This dissertation examined how community colleges undergo transformational change today, along with the ways in which those colleges' cultures alter amid the change process.

Historically community colleges have been open access institutions of higher education (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013). They were founded to provide foundational coursework for students to complete before transferring to a four-year institution, where they might not have been successful if had they started their studies there initially (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013). Community colleges expanded their mission to career and technical education starting during the Great Depression, with the post-World War II years marking the culmination of the workforce focus (Brint & Karabel, 1989). This dual focus on both transfer and workforce development has led to criticism of mission creep and institutional ineffectiveness (Beach, 2012). Despite this criticism, community colleges proliferated during the Cold War years, with over 1,000 community and technical colleges in operation by the end of the twentieth century (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

More people in the United States are turning to community colleges to earn a credential enabling them to transfer or advance in their career (Rosenbaum et al, 2017). These credentials are critical lifelines for those students who would otherwise be trapped between declining social mobility and increasing economic inequality. However, a host of issues obstruct students' ability to succeed including organizational insufficiencies (Kezar, 2018). Limited institutional funding (Akers & Chingos, 2016), transformative technology (Mazoué, 2012; Miller, 2014), the shift toward privatization (McClure, Barringer, & Brown, 2020), and economic globalization (Merisotis, 2015; Zajda, 2008) are pushing community colleges to embark on transformational change to adapt to external pressures. Beyond external pressures, community colleges are internally grappling with how to improve campus climate (Jones, 2013) and achieve equity (Bragg & Durham, 2012) to support student success, particularly as they are increasingly held accountable for student outcomes (Baer, Duin & Bushway, 2015).

The multifaceted and complex nature of changes coming to community colleges (both internal and external) require careful and strategic responses. External changes have altered the higher education landscape at large and the community college field so thoroughly that traditional approaches to running community colleges are less effective, if not altogether ineffective (Phelan, 2015). These changes are overdue, and much of the external pressure to change stems from higher education's having "failed to achieve significant and needed change"; higher education must "fundamentally different strategies, business models, and emerging practices to deal with the Age of Disruption . . ." (Norris, Brodnick, & Lefrere, 2013, p. 11). Colleges seeking to adapt have to build institutional capacity, and they have national organizations and frameworks available to guide their efforts (Stout, 2016; Toma, 2010). By building institutional capacity, community colleges will be able to take measured risks, act

entrepreneurial, and enact a strategic vision and enduring changes that strengthen access to and completion of credentials (*Crisis*, 2013).

The goals for community colleges to achieve are clear: stronger institutional capacity and greater student success. But reaching these goals entails transformational change, a powerful but difficult process wherein an organization's practices, policies, and culture are fundamentally altered--and sometimes even the very mission of the organization (Kezar, 2018). Reinvigorating community colleges to best serve their communities today requires "a rethinking, realignment, and reinvention of institutional policies and practices around a culture of student success" (Baer & Duin, 2014, p. 33). Transformational change should go beyond boutique programs (requisite programs adopted to go along with national trends) and narrow initiatives. To be effective, transformational change must encompass the entire college, remove barriers between units and departments, and revitalize the organization's culture around student success (Stout, 2016).

Today's community colleges are working to improve student success in six key reform areas: career and college readiness, strategic enrollment management, developmental education reform, guided pathways implementation, college transfer, and labor market alignment. Taken together, each of these areas can fundamentally reshape community colleges as transitional institutions of higher education, where students acquire the skills and education needed to progress toward their goals (Stout, 2016). Career and college readiness, strategic enrollment management, and developmental education reform are poised to expedite students' entrance into college-level curricula and boost their early momentum (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015). Guided pathways implementation (also applicable to developmental education), college transfer, and labor market alignment chart students' path toward their chosen educational and professional

goals, ensuring they gain the necessary competencies and learning outcomes as they advance (Wyner, 2014).

Beyond the reform areas listed above, community colleges also need to build significant institutional capacity in several areas: leadership, equity, collaboration, data literacy, teaching and learning, and noncognitive factors impacting student success (Lawton, 2018; Torres, Hagedorn, & Heacock, 2018). Community college leadership increasingly obliges leaders to orient their institutions around a strong student success vision, and to take entrepreneurial risks and effectively allocate resources to accomplish that vision (*Crisis*, 2013). Increasingly equity is being recognized as the cornerstone of a strong student success vision, as it focuses attention both on disparities in outcomes (Bragg, 2017a) and the extent to which the diversity of campus members (administrators, faculty, and staff) resemble the diversity of the student population (Chun & Evans, 2018).

Having established an equity-minded student success vision, senior leaders must work to reduce “siloeing” on campus (the tendency of different departments or units across campus not to interact closely) and foster collaboration (Lloyd, 2016). Collaboration with an emphasis on equity is enhanced through promoting data literacy (which allows for student outcome gaps to become visible and unavoidable) and effective teaching and learning (which centers on using effective pedagogy and culturally responsive practices to increase classroom learning) (Gist, 2014; MacMillan, 2015). Collaboration between faculty and staff allows for community colleges to address noncognitive factors that impair student success and outcomes if students do not receive sufficient support to overcome these barriers (Kalamkarian, Boynton, & Lopez, 2018; Lawton, 2018).

As seen in the following subsections, however, these crucial reform areas for student success and institutional capacities are commonly approached in a disconnected and fragmented way. There are, of course, admirable exceptions which have addressed these areas through a unified and integrated strategy, often utilizing a national reform framework like that of the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program or Achieving the Dream's Institutional Capacity Framework to coordinate their efforts (Stout, 2016). More commonly, community colleges are taking on these key areas for improving student success separately, which limits the extent of transformational change possible.

Increasingly, community colleges are exploring how transformational change involving the entire college might be the best avenue for implementing the reforms and building the capacities described in the coming pages (Hagedorn, 2015; Torres, Hagedorn, & Heacock, 2018). By themselves, any of the key reforms and essential institutional capacities described below could transform colleges carefully and systematically implementing that reform or developing that capacity. Unfortunately, the more common outcome is that specific teams or units at a college are transformed, but the windfall of isolated transformational change is not strong enough to reach and fundamentally alter the college's campus culture, organizational silos, and institutional policies and practices (Stout, 2016).

### **Key Areas for Reform**

That higher education at large needs to reform in order to restore positive public opinion and demonstrate its social value is widely accepted (Eckel & Couturier, 2006), and community colleges are not immune to external pressure to change (Wyner, 2014). In recent years, six key areas for reform have emerged for community colleges: career and college readiness, strategic enrollment management, developmental education reform, guided pathways implementation,

college transfer, and labor market alignment. These six reform areas are concerned with successfully getting students into and through community colleges. Career and college readiness and developmental education reform concentrate on channeling students into community colleges and ensuring they are prepared for college-level coursework. Guided pathways implementation, college transfer, and labor market alignment all endeavor to ensure students work toward clear academic and professional goals while enrolled at the community college, making expedited progress toward those goals each semester. These reforms are designed to transform community colleges into hubs of opportunity, institutions of higher education where students can come to as a low-cost transition point to whatever career or program of study they intend to pursue afterward (Wyner, 2014). Community college leaders need to make the case for these reform areas to their boards and campus members (Eckel & Trower, 2018).

Community colleges have historically supported students in preparing for college-level coursework, but in recent years a focus on career and college readiness has colleges exploring strategies for helping students be prepared for their courses. College readiness has been directly associated with strong student outcomes and timely graduation (Jackson & Kurlaender, 2014). Yet gaining admission to college is far easier than being—or becoming—college-ready (Adelman, 2006; Rodríguez, 2015). Readiness tends to focus on academic aspects of preparedness, but noncognitive factors (resource security, family, health, and emotional well-being, among others) are increasingly recognized as paramount to student success (Duncheon, 2015). Partnerships between community colleges and K-12 institutions have developed tools for identifying underpreparedness, yet taking action on the information yielded by these tools is more difficult (Garcia, 2015). Positioning the infrastructure, interinstitutional agreements, and crucial supports needed for students to be ready is a “process riddled with roadblocks in

practice” (Anderson & Nieves, 2020). Some states such as North Carolina are implementing partnership programs where community college instructors teach remedial courses to high school students to become college-ready (NC, 2015). Summer bridge programs like the Tiger Gateway Program have been effective in helping students become more academically and socially ready for college prior to the start of the fall semester (Wilson & Lowry, 2017).

Increasingly, community colleges are monitoring enrollment and demographic shifts using strategic enrollment management for groups like high school students. The need for strategic enrollment management emerged in part from recognition of coming demographic shifts and their projected impact on future enrollment from data sets like the 1998 Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (Hossler, 2015). Higher education competes for students from multiple markets, meaning it has to deploy diverse strategies for successfully matriculating students who could pursue opportunities elsewhere (Bontrager & Hossler, 2015). Given the complexities of strategic enrollment management, colleges and universities rely on data to guide their marketing and recruitment outreach (Haycock, 2006). For community colleges, strategic enrollment management is useful because it provides an important set of tools for expanding access to more students, particularly groups that have been underserved by higher education for decades if not centuries.

As community colleges increase their practice of strategic enrollment management, they are also relying on college and career readiness programs to drive important reforms, though many students still begin their first academic semester at a community college still needing remediation in mathematics, reading, and/or writing. Developmental or remedial courses are problematic, however, given the lower persistence and completion rates experienced by students taking these courses compared to students placing directly into curriculum-level courses

(Valentine et al., 2017). Recent initiatives like Completion by Design have advocated for accelerating students' progress through non-credit developmental courses, which all too often hinder students' path toward a degree (The Path, 2017). Prior to Completion by Design, less than half of the students referred to remediation completed the sequence of developmental courses needed (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010). Research on the acceleration approach to reforming developmental education to date indicates this reform is effective in expediting students into college-level coursework, though less is known about how well these students perform once they are fully in college-level courses (Hodara & Jaggars, 2014). More recently, community colleges have begun exploring the prospect of moving to a corequisite model, where students complete remedial courses while also beginning their curriculum (Mangan, 2019).

Community colleges are focusing not only on expediting students' paths into college-level curricula but also *through* those programs to graduation through guided pathways. The liberal arts emphasis in higher education has allowed for relative freedom in course selection (Stover, 2017), but recently this approach, rebranded the "cafeteria model" to course-taking, has come under criticism for allowing credit accumulation without swift progress toward degrees (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015). The Community College Research Center (CCRC, Teachers College, Columbia University) has led America's community colleges in implementing guided pathways, carefully sequenced curricula that provide students a clear path toward a degree.

Early research by CCRC that set the stage for guided pathways found that students supported through clearly sequenced curricula were more likely to be successful (Hughes, Karp, & Fermin, 2006). Establishing milestones within pathways for students to achieve and aligning state policies to support pathways were identified early on as two important mechanisms for strengthening pathways (Calcagno et al., 2006; Hughes & Karp, 2006). Since then, the guided

pathways reform movement has evolved to focus on four key areas of practice: (1) mapping pathways to students' goals; (2) helping students select the path best suited to their interests and abilities; (3) monitoring students' progress toward completion; and (4) tracking student learning outcomes as students progress through their curriculum (Jenkins et al., 2018).

Guided pathways are designed to put students on clear paths toward either transferring to a four-year college or university or entering the workforce, though complications in both areas persist despite the gains achieved through guided pathways. In the case of college transfer, numerous and longstanding challenges to successfully transferring and attaining baccalaureate remain (Townsend, 2001). Non-transferrable credits (either due to students completing the wrong courses for their chosen four-year degree or those requirements changing) slow students' progress toward baccalaureate and can even jeopardize their ability to complete due to limitations on how long they can receive financial aid (Belfield, Fink, & Jenkins, 2017). Transfer offers access to baccalaureate for an increasingly diverse student body of historically underrepresented groups (Bragg, 2017), but equity gaps in completion persist (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Castro & Cortez, 2017). Articulation agreements between community colleges and four-year institutions are meant to avoid credit loss, yet they tend to only preserve credits (some of which enter the college or university but do not count toward the student's chosen degree program) without strengthening a student's chance of earning a bachelor's degree (Roksa & Keith, 2008). To improve transfer, community colleges are increasingly working to prioritize transfer, leverage guided pathways, and improve advising practices (Wyner et al., 2016).

In addition to transfer, guided pathways are also designed to contribute to community colleges aligning their programs and degree with labor market needs. Community colleges are considered crucial to meeting America's changing workforce needs, counteracting inequities in

opportunity and promoting social mobility in the process (Anderson & Nieves, 2020; Merisotis, 2016). Fulfilling this responsibility is not easy, however, since the economy is constantly changing (Cleary, Kerrigan & Van Noy, 2017). Completing any level of college coursework is associated with improved labor market outcomes for students (Averett & Dalessandro, 2001), but students maximize their labor market outcomes when they complete their chosen certificate or degree program (Perna, Kvaal & Ruiz, 2017). Economic and labor market data can be helpful to community colleges working to align their career and technical programs with current workforce needs, though issues with data (lags in publication, non-representative samples, limited access) hamper community colleges' ability to make highly informed and sound evidence-based decisions (Lebesch, 2012).

Recent reforms have made important strides in improving student success by increasing college readiness, developing clear curricula, and linking programs to bachelor's degrees through transfer or to jobs through labor market alignment. Taken together, community colleges are focusing on preparedness and momentum. Community colleges are working to ensure their students enter prepared for college-level coursework and leave further prepared to be successful at a four-year institution or upon entering the workforce. Related to preparedness is momentum, ensuring students continue learning and removing obstacles to their progress through their chosen program of study. Further improvements around preparedness and momentum are anticipated to lead to stronger student outcomes. But approaching these reforms without a focus on transformational change all too often limits the potential impact they could have on institutional effectiveness and student success.

### **Essential Institutional Capacities**

The reform efforts around preparedness and momentum are important, but community colleges also need to focus on improving key institutional capacities to leverage gains from reforms. According to Toma (2010), institutional capacity goes beyond planning and assessment, “incorporating how an institution can employ all of its available resources to maximum effort” (p. 3). Capacities are foundational aspects of an institution, which enable them to pursue and accomplish their vision (Toma, 2010). Leadership, communication and collaboration, equity, data and data literacy, teaching and learning, and noncognitive student supports are among the key capacities central to community colleges improving student success rates.

Strong leadership remains central to organizational effectiveness and is the bedrock of transformational change occurring (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). It is particularly essential given the entrepreneurial and risk-taking aspects of the executive job now required to be effective, all while resisting the “romanticization” of leadership wherein change centers on the executive and not the changes she or he inculcates (Beckley, 2020; *Crisis*, 2013). Simultaneously, leaders benefit from taking a more collaborative, nurturing, and developmental approach to leadership, which is a significant departure from traditional approaches to literature (rooted in authority and patriarchal norms) (Eddy & Khwaja, 2019; Kezar & Posselt, 2019). These changing roles of leadership are both performed while the leader is navigating the complexities of her or his organizational structure and design (Stout, 2016). Community college leaders struggle to maintain the open access mission of community colleges while limiting increases in tuition and other expenditures amid declining state funding (Price, Schneider, & Quick, 2016). The task of community college leaders, then, is to chart bold and innovative paths forward, charge their campus members with accomplishing key priorities and goals in dynamic

and collaborative ways, and improve student outcomes through increased institutional effectiveness without relying on continued or increased state financial support.

As community college leaders establish visions for institutional improvement and student success, collaboration and communication become an important to generating buy-in and making necessary cultural shifts (Mokher et al, 2019). According to Kezar and Lester (2009), “People need a vision for a new collaborative approach that they believe can be implemented on their campus” (pp. 41-42). Collaborative leadership begins with collaborative decision-making, which allows campus members to feel heard and connected to change efforts since their input helped direct those efforts (Edwards, 2017). To offset burnout, executives can shift leadership responsibilities to new college members as initiatives change and the organizational culture alters (Kaplan, Serafeim, & Tugendhat, 2018). Internal collaboration is an important starting point for external partnerships and collaboration (Sink & Jackson, 2002), which is particularly important as collective impact approaches to institutional and social improvement are all the more crucial to community colleges being successful today (Christens & Inzeo, 2015). With collaboration must come effective communication strategies, as failure to communicate jeopardizes campus units’ ability to work together effectively (Edwards, 2017).

As leaders and their college members collaboratively focus increasingly on student outcomes despite declining resources, equity needs to be at the forefront of institutional improvement efforts (Kezar & Posselt, 2019; Posselt et al., 2020). Achievement gaps persist due to centuries-old inequities that have tendered an education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006; McNair, Bensimon, & Malcom-Piqueux, 2020). Serious and troubling equity gaps persist despite growing awareness of the need for all students to be successful, especially those who have long been disadvantaged (Wyner, 2014). An important starting point for community colleges is to diversify

campus leadership and faculty, though efforts to accomplish this are limited, particularly in regions with regrettably strong historic legacies of racism (Chun & Evans, 2018). Community colleges also need to adopt equity-mindedness and a commitment to inclusive excellence (Dowd & Elmore, 2019; McNair, Bensimon, & Malcom-Piqueux, 2020). Community colleges also need to conduct a comprehensive audit and analysis of all areas where gaps in equity may linger: access to higher education (Gagliardi & Johnson, 2019; Glater, 2016), information about labor market outcomes (Anderson & Nieves, 2020; Palmadessa, 2017), gender imbalances in enrollment patterns (Morimoto & Zajicek, 2014), distribution of financial aid (Mitchell, Leachman, & Masterson, 2017), and learning outcomes (Mazoué, 2012), to name but some of the most likely locations for equity gaps to appear. America's economy, workforce, and political and civic processes depend on equity in higher education, so gaps in outcomes along the lines of equity has dire consequences for the United States (Merisotis, 2015).

One of the best tools available to community colleges to identify equity gaps is data, but improved data literacy is crucial to campus members grasping equity gaps and identifying improvement strategies capable of reducing, if not closing, those gaps. Institutional improvement rests on colleges' ability to understand data and take action based on their analysis of the evidence (Bryk et al., 2015) – an ability challenged when majoritarian and cultural deficit perspectives impinge on college members' understanding of and actions taken in response to data (Dowd & Elmore, 2019). Community colleges tend to struggle with institutional data, having little capacity in their institutional research offices to do much beyond institutional compliance reporting (Torres, Hagedorn, & Heacock, 2018). The effort and resources required to build data capacity are not insignificant, but investments in data allow community colleges to identify institutional weaknesses and gaps and student outcomes, and take appropriate action

based on their findings (Collins & Couturier, 2008). Improved data capacity is not limited to offices of institutional research and running predictive analytics, however (Gagliardi & Johnson, 2020). Community colleges need to then build data literacy across campus, helping staff and faculty understand and make data-driven decisions about how to improve their services and efforts once they have been trained to do so (Dejean et al., 2018).

Improved data literacy is but one avenue for helping faculty collectively build another important institutional capacity: teaching and learning. Teaching has undergone significant change, particularly as the growth of online education has altered the medium by which teaching is delivered to students (Mazoué, 2012). Faculty are oftentimes compelled to teach by internal motivation and a desire to change students' lives and thinking (Brown et al., 2016). Regrettably, the training faculty receive to teach in a non-racialized way is all too often insufficient in preparing them for the challenges found in community college classrooms (Posselt et al, 2020; Stout, 2018). An important starting point with building capacity around teaching and learning is to clarify student learning outcomes, which provides an important baseline for curriculum and course redesigns, pedagogical changes, and greater emphasis on key competencies students need to develop to be successful (Tucker, Byrnes-Loinette, & Bodary, 2018). This process tends to be administrative-driven, but increasingly practitioners and researchers alike are recognizing the need for these changes to be faculty-led (Iuzzini & Eynan, 2020; Terosky & Conway, 2020).

The community college classroom is where students learn key competencies needed for when they transfer and enter the workforce, but noncognitive aspects of the college experience, if unaccounted for, can impede students' ability to achieve desired learning outcomes. Rodríguez (2015) found that roughly seventy-five percent of students drop out of classes for nonacademic, noncognitive reasons: health, family, food insecurity, lack of transportation, childcare

challenges, and more. These students have great potential for success, but if their basic needs go unmet they are significantly disadvantaged in their efforts to achieve their goals (McDougal et al., 2018). Students' motivation, perceptions, and self-regulation of behavior suffer when noncognitive needs go unmet (Fong et al., 2017). As community colleges attempt to make whole-college changes, they must account for and build capacity around supporting the noncognitive aspects of the student experience in order to see stronger learning and student outcomes (*Holistic*, 2018).

As with the key reforms described earlier, these essential institutional capacities are best leveraged when developed concurrently and in conjunction with one another. A dynamic leader may cast an inspiring and bold vision for student success, but this vision will wither and ring hollow if it does not foster collaboration across campus, use data to identify areas for improvement, and infuse equity throughout improvement efforts. Faculty may have established clear learning outcomes and ensure students are learning through pedagogically sound and culturally responsive approaches to teaching, but the impact of such an emphasis on teaching and learning is stifled if students' noncognitive needs are going unmet. Capacities need to be developed concurrently to leverage the full transformational potential of each capacity.

### **Overview and Significance of Study**

As discussed above, community colleges are endeavoring to address the areas for reform and build institutional capacities described above to varying extents. Yet their efforts tend to be disconnected. The literature on transformational change indicates that strong leadership, strategic planning, and effective communication can foster organizational improvement and positive cultural shifts. Researchers have studied transformational change in higher education. To date, however, this research has focused on four-year colleges and universities. Expanding the higher

education literature on transformational change to community colleges is an important new direction for research. This shift in research is particularly timely given the extensive reforms and capacities community colleges are working to instill. Literature on transformational change suggests community colleges would see greater change (and increased student success) if they harnessed the principles of transformational change while undertaking key reforms and capacities. This inference needs to be tested through research, which would in turn expand the body of literature on transformational change.

To guide the present study, I selected Kezar and Eckel's theory of transformational change, which they espoused in a landmark article published in 2002. Based on their research, Kezar and Eckel identified five essential strategies to transformational change: senior administrative support, collaborative leadership, robust design, staff development, and visible action. An important caveat is that these strategies must be interrelated for transformational change to occur. Further, sensemaking amid transformational change impacts the cultural shifts that occur amid the change process. Kezar and Eckel's theory of transformational change is frequently cited, but it has not yet been widely applied to frame a study of transformational change happening at community colleges.

This qualitative study is a multi-site case study, with three sites for research identified through a two-tiered criterion selection process. Sites are selected based on colleges having earned national recognition as (1) an Achieving the Dream Leader College, Leader College of Distinction, or Leah Meyer Austin Award, and (2) having been a finalist or winner for the 2019 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, the latter being awarded by the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program. I performed analysis of student outcomes data provided by participating colleges in their Aspen Prize applications, as well as qualitative analysis of their

transformational change narratives. I also scheduled interviews via online meeting platforms with college presidents and two to three key leaders who have been instrumental in the change process. Interview data was converted to text and analyzed categorically to triangulate colleges' quantitative and qualitative data in their 2019 Aspen Prize applications.

This multi-site qualitative case study was designed and conducted leading up to and during the onset of coronavirus (COVID-19). The study was originally designed to replicate as many of Kezar and Eckel's (2002) methods as possible. Interviews were initially scheduled to occur in March and April 2020, precisely when colleges began closing for the spring semester, moving courses online, and implementing "social distancing" measures. As the global health crisis developed, national and academic health guidelines around travel and in-person meetings made conducting this study unfeasible, as the health and safety of participants and the researcher alike had to be prioritized. With no clear end of the crisis in sight and ongoing uncertainty of when colleges will fully re-open and have capacity to engage in hosting research, I had to modify my research methods (outlined above and detailed in depth in later chapters) in order for it to proceed in this unprecedented new situation.

Despite the setbacks caused by COVID-19, this study made important contributions to the community college field and higher education at large. One important contribution is the study of transformational change as a comprehensive and whole-college endeavor, which is a step most research published to date that focuses on individual initiatives and their transformational impact. It also expands the literature on transformational change in higher education by focusing on community colleges instead of four-year colleges and universities, the latter of which have been the primary subject so far. The multi-site case study design, along with the tiered selection criteria, allow for transformational change to be studied in varied contexts.

This study also applies Kezar and Eckel's theory of transformational change, expanding the literature by testing the theory's accuracy in a setting other than four-year colleges and universities.

### **Conclusion**

Transformational change offers one of the most promising approaches to synthesizing efforts in key areas for student success reform, along with other region-specific areas of focus, around a student success vision, improved collaboration and communication across campuses, and coordinated leadership. Approaching these areas of student success through the lens of transformational change allows colleges to align improvement efforts, stimulate ideas, foster a healthier and more equity-minded campus culture, and work toward accomplishing clear outcomes and metrics.

This dissertation study sought to identify community colleges where transformational change is occurring and investigate how these colleges are undergoing the change process. Kezar and Eckel (2002) made a significant contribution to the field by identifying key strategies for transformational change, and the role of sensemaking in guiding the change process. Community colleges are clearly attempting to undertake transformational change, but where and how this is occurring has not yet been thoroughly studied. As outlined in this dissertation, I have added to the growing body of literature on transformational change and offer findings that help more community colleges conceptualize and enact transformational change.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The volume of literature on the change process and transformative change is vast and multitudinous (Kezar & Eckel, 2002). Besides wide interest in change, researchers have filtered into two different schools or approaches to change: (1) the content school, which uses quantitative approaches to explore conditions for and consequences of change; and (2) the process school, which uses qualitative approaches to understand people's thinking and actions amid change (Kezar & Eckel, 2002). To focus their literature review, Kezar and Eckel (2002) concentrated on teleological or planned change, one of six main categories of change process theories (the others being biological, lifecycle, political, social cognition, and cultural).

Due to the immense scope of teleological change process literature, I elected to write a targeted literature review of the teleological change process to focus on directly relevant resources (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) offered preliminary criteria for focusing a literature review: verifying authorial expertise, finding contemporary research, establishing criteria for relevance, and evaluating the resource's quality.

To set further parameters for this literature review, I have also established targeted methods to vet my literature collection procedures and inclusion criteria. Article collection procedures include a publication date range, specified search terms, peer-reviewed sources, consultation with experts, and ancestral search procedures. To filter their results, researchers can apply inclusion criteria such as connection to study focus, reliance on data, and relevance to their research problem statement and purpose of study.

This literature review begins with an overview of my theoretical framework, literature collection procedures, inclusion criteria for sources, and an appraisal of the literature base. I then

present the findings of my literature review on the teleological change process and transformative change as it relates to my dissertation study's focus.

### **Theoretical Framework**

My theoretical framework to explore the change process and transformational change is modeled on that of Kezar and Eckel (2002). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) claimed that a theoretical framework is meant to scaffold or frame a study, particularly in the way it encapsulates a study's problem statement and the underlying purpose of the study. Theory emerges at various levels. Jaeger et al. (2013) drew from Neuman (2000), who asserted that theory surfaces at macro and micro levels, the former being someone's "overarching philosophical paradigm," and the latter being the "problems and situations" surfacing amid one's "daily work" (Jaeger et al, 2013). One might aspire to theoretical agnosticism (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003), a positivist attempt to approach research design and analysis free of preconceptions, but attempting this does not account for the inherent theoretical orientation one unavoidably embeds within the conceptualization and structure of a study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

My primary theoretical framework utilizes Kezar and Eckel's teleologically based change process model for transformative change. Based on their literature review of transformational change, they identified seven strategies they found were associated with transformational change successfully occurring. Only five of the seven strategies identified in Kezar and Eckel's review of literature on transformational change were supported by their research findings. The five strategies that were supported were "senior administrative support, collaborative leadership, robust design, staff development, and visible action" (p. 303). These five strategies resemble but

also differ in significant ways from the seven initial strategies they identified from their literature review of teleologically-focused research on transformational change.

Kezar and Eckel's (2002) theoretical framework of transformative change has guided the focus and phrasing of my research questions. The first research question seeks to explore how well the five strategies for transformative change described above also explain the change process at research sites (described in Methods, below). My second research question aims to identify transformative change is accompanied by sensemaking, a practice Kezar and Eckel (2002) found to be important. Finally, my third research question inquires after the interconnectedness of the five strategies for transformative change. This theory has guided my research design and efforts to validate Kezar and Eckel's (2002) claims about transformative change.

I also utilized sensemaking theory to explore the change process at my research sites. Kezar and Eckel (2002)'s research design did not explicitly embed sensemaking theory into their study design. Sensemaking begins with leaders, who must first draw from past experiences and longstanding beliefs to form an explanation of what is occurring (Weick, 1995). Leaders then function as sensegivers when they begin guiding the thinking and understanding of others (Thayer, 1988). I turned to Eddy's research (2003; 2005; 2006; 2010) on sensemaking at community colleges to guide my integration of sensemaking theory into my larger theoretical framework of transformational change as proposed by Kezar and Eckel (2002). Eddy has applied sensemaking theory by first exploring how community college presidents explained change at their campus, then triangulated presidents' perspectives with those of campus members: other administrators, faculty, and staff. Sensemaking is an important to transformational change worthy of exploration because it is an important indicator of how well the change strategies have

been implemented and what impact they are having on campus members and the organizational culture at large. Others have called for sensemaking to be applied more in research on higher education and community colleges specifically (Dowd & Elmore, 2019; McNair, Bensimon & Malcom-Piqueux, 2020).

Adopting Kezar and Eckel's (2002) theoretical framework for transformative change at new research sites and in a different milieu provides a unique opportunity to contribute to change process literature focused on transformative change. Recent changes in higher education have increased the importance of community colleges undergoing important change processes like capacity building with the assistance of national organizations driving reform efforts (Stout, 2016). The merits of Kezar and Eckel's (2002) theoretical framework for transformative change are many and impressive, but researchers need to continuously apply existing theoretical frameworks in new settings, and propose amendments to those theoretical frameworks based on new evidence and findings.

To date community college researchers have not thoroughly applied Kezar and Eckel's transformative change theory. To date, instances where Kezar and Eckel's (2002) framework is referenced are confined to doctoral dissertations. In one such doctoral dissertation, Stich (2008) noted this same gap but did not apply the theory in her meta-ethnographic analysis of organizational change at four community colleges. Ching (2017) and Bennis-Owens (2015) both validated Kezar and Eckel's (2002) assertion that sensemaking impacts transformational change, but Ching's study focused chiefly on an equity initiative that was not clearly transformational change. Rentsch (2018) cited Kezar and Eckel's (2002) findings on transformational change and sensemaking in a literature review but did not apply their framework to studying academic deans' role during planned change. My dissertation study is to be among the first studies to

explicitly and holistically apply Kezar and Eckel's (2002) framework for transformational change to study transformational change at community colleges.

### **Literature Review Methods**

#### *Literature Collection Procedures*

I developed two sets of literature collection procedures, as gathering relevant sources on theory and recent research require different approaches to search and selection. For core works of theory on the teleological change process or transformative change, I began with Kezar and Eckel's published work on transformational change to identify other key theoretical publications through ancestral research methods. I supplemented these sources with Bess & Dee's seminal 2008 two-volume work on organizations, as well as resources located through library query searches.

Once these initial landmark works of theory were compiled, I scanned these resources for relevance and in the process performed ancestral research procedures. Ancestral research procedures entail identifying additional key sources discovered through reviewing an initial set of sources. In this case, I used ancestral research procedures to locate additional landmark works of theory that clearly influenced the works of theory put forward by Kezar, Eckel, and Bess and Dee.

My literature collection procedures for recent research differed from those for landmark works of theory. I confined the publication date range from 2014 to 2019 to ensure results are recent. I also limited results to peer-reviewed publications in the field of education. I then ran four separate search queries, which divide into two categories: (1) recent research published by Adrianna Kezar and/or Peter Eckel, and (2) recent research in higher education at large or

community colleges specifically that address (a) the teleological change process or (b) transformative change. These four search queries for recent research yielded exactly 250 results.

I repeated the same research process described above to account for new articles and books published between April 2019 and December 2020, the period during which this dissertation study was delayed due to the onset of COVID-19. This search process yielded sixteen additional sources. Only one of sixteen sources found in this second round of research failed to meet the inclusion criteria. One interesting trend that emerged was the increased focus on equity in my second round of literature research for this dissertation study. These sources all were being finalized and/or published prior to COVID-19 and the “summer of social justice” that happened in 2020, yet their insights into equity are important guiding lights as the consciousness around equity in higher education as a field.

#### *Inclusion Criteria for Sources*

After collecting relevant literature outlined above, I selected which sources to include using a set of criteria. I retained landmark works of theory identified through consultation with graduate faculty experts and subsequent ancestral research procedures (see above) unless they proved to be less relevant upon carefully reading them. These landmark works of theory informed my understanding of the body of literature on the teleological change process and transformational change, and framed the place of Kezar and Eckel's (2002) theory of transformative change within that larger body of literature. As discussed in the Methods section (see below), this body of literature will be particularly important to the findings section of my dissertation, particularly after evaluating the validity of Kezar and Eckel's theory of transformative change based on the results of my multi-site case study.

Inclusion criteria for recent publications on the teleological change process and transformative change in higher education differed from that of landmark works of theory. In this case, I initially stipulated that articles be evidence-based (have a quantitative or qualitative basis) and be directly related to higher education at large or community colleges specifically. To verify potential sources met these criteria, I read all abstracts and started to rule out those that failed to explicitly meet one or both inclusion criteria. I created an inclusion criteria chart that logged each article's parenthetical citation, topics of focus, and methodology. Based on this information, I recorded my assessment of whether to include or exclude the article from my literature review.

It became apparent early on that many recent articles on transformational change in community colleges showcased interventions without presenting thorough data supporting the efficacy of a given intervention. Journals such as *New Directions for Community Colleges* and *Planning for Higher Education* appeared prominently in my search results. These journals feature leading voices and thinkers advocating for student success at and community colleges, and the ideas and interventions written about are among the most promising and inspiring for pushing reform and increasing student success. Nonetheless, they tend not to explicitly present data on outcomes. I chose to include them anyway because doing so provides an accurate picture of where research on transformational change at community colleges is at present: alternating between data-informed research and intervention showcasing, with the opportunity to tip toward data-driven research if more rigorous research on transformational change is done. My hope is that this dissertation will be one study pushing the scales toward more data-driven research on transformational change.

*Appraisal of Literature Base*

The literature on transformational change in higher education (and community colleges specifically) captures how key strategies and sensemaking impact the change process. Kezar's research has continued to drive our understanding of transformative change. Her concurrent and later research have reinforced her 2002 findings with Eckel. Kezar's 2014 book, *How Colleges Change* (now in its second edition, 2018), has reinforced the principles of transformational change she initially put forward with Eckel in 2002. Though her work has dominated discussions of and thinking about transformational change, in her publications Kezar has cited but not further developed her theoretical model with Eckel in 2002 into a formal theory of transformational change. Kezar reiterated the power of transformational change in her book *How Colleges Change* (2018), but Kezar focused on transformational leadership – an important starting point for transformational change, but not all-encompassing. Kezar and Eckel's theory of transformational change would benefit from being used in additional studies such as this dissertation study.

As noted above, there is limited recent research on the change process and transformational change in community college body of literature that utilizes thorough research methods. Much of the literature is focused on best practices and interventions but lacks rigorous research methods and a robust presentation of data to back up findings. The literature on transformational change in community college also tends to focus on individual change efforts or initiatives rather than whole-college change. As a result, this literature presents promising practices associated with transformational change but, broadly speaking, lacks sufficient evidence to validate change efforts and provide models for moving forward.

Of the five transformational change strategies Kezar and Eckel (2002) identified (discussed below), most recent literature on community colleges has focused on leadership and design (Brock, Mayer, & Rutschow, 2016; Kadlec & Rowlett, 2014; Littlepage et al., 2018; Person & Thibeault, 2016). Visible action and communication have been emphasized the least, though the structures and roll-out methods were predicated upon effective communication and people being able to clearly see what is occurring amid the change process. Research indicates the early executive support for and leadership of transformational change is important, but leaders also need to delegate leadership of the change process after launching transformational change on campus (Klein, 2017; Klempin & Karp, 2018; Rodicio, Mayer, & Jenkins, 2014). Staff development is also cited as important to the change process, though the literature rarely assesses the impact of staff development in relation to the transformational change process.

### **Literature Review Findings**

This literature review provides an account of relevant literature on transformational change. It begins with a short description of the complexities found in higher education organizations and their cultures. It moves to the origins of pressure to change (both external and internal), and how some campus leaders in turn launch a transformational change process to successfully adapt their organizations to a changed social and economic landscape. Emphasis is placed on Kezar and Eckel's theory of transformational change since that drives the focus of the present study. Having introduced transformational change, the literature review describes research on change efforts at community colleges around the five key strategies for transformational change (senior administrative support, collaborative leadership, robust design, staff development, and visible action), along with the role of sensemaking amid transformational change.

*Complexity of Higher Education Organizations as Institutions*

Institutions in higher education are unique organizations. They vary widely along lines of mission, operational status (public or private), governance, funding, students served, support services, history, and more (Bess & Dee, 2008). Colleges and universities are also unique in the ways they use (or forgo) consensus forming, power and governance, vision and values, leadership styles, and distribution of responsibilities (Birnbaum, 1988). Regardless of institutional type (or Carnegie classification), these organizations comprise an array of units with responsibilities that are distinct yet interrelated: academic affairs (teaching and learning-centered practices); student affairs or student services; enrollment management; marketing, communications, and external relations (including development); and institutional administration (i.e., operations) and finance (Bess & Dee, 2008).

Given the complexity of operations in higher education, these organizations have been described as loosely coupled systems that may not be as effectively or purposefully interconnected as is optimal (Weick, 1976). College administrators and faculty struggle to guide their institution's direction when they do neither "understand [nor] control the processes of their institutions" (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 15; see also Mooney, 1963). Insufficient evaluation and monitoring could identify shortcomings, but many organizations lack the capacity and coordination needed to systematically identify policies and practices hindering institutional effectiveness and student success (Saunders, 2016). In some cases, however, loose coupling (Weick, 1976) can compel campus members to collaboratively and voluntarily explore creative solutions to problems, increase their commitment to the institution, and reduce reliance on monitoring performance and key outputs (Birnbaum, 1988).

Community colleges are unique organizations within the wide sphere of higher education. They are open-door institutions that offer different credentials (certificates, diplomas, and degrees) in three distinct program types: continuing education, career and technical, and college transfer (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013). The multidimensional mission of community colleges has garnered criticism—namely, that the "comprehensive mission of community colleges lacks sufficient focus, causing them to compete with numerous other organizations on multiple fronts" (Boggs & McPhail, 2016, p. 16; also see Ayers, 2005; Brint & Karabel, 1991; Dougherty, 1994; and Rhoades & Valdez, 1996). Community colleges were created to extend economic and educational opportunities to individuals, and to provide comprehensive educational support to the communities they serve (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015; Boggs & McPhail, 2016) -- a crucial and admirable but also sprawling and ever-changing mission to pursue (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006; Levinson, 2005).

### *Organizational Culture*

It comes as no surprise that the organizational culture of community colleges is unique. It is the "social glue" (Tierney, 2008, p. 2) that impacts how an institution enacts its values and pursues its goals (Bess & Dee, 2008). It can also differentiate and fragment into factions and subcultures that shift over time (Martin, 1992). Despite these interpersonal shifts, culture gravitates around an organization's artifacts, values, and basic assumptions (Schein, 1992). Cultural shifts take place within an organization's larger saga, or trajectory from inception (launch of an organization) to fulfillment (becoming real to organization members, who work to drive forward the organizational mission and goals) (Clark, 1972). Culture tugs toward stability but tends to "lag behind" internal and external change, which can create friction and potential conflict within an organization (Bess & Dee, 2008; Parsons, 1951). Cultural change tends to

occur alongside shifting changes in values, priorities, and norms (Kezar & Bernstein-Sierra, 2020).

The offshoot origins of community colleges (stemming from the centuries-old traditional model of higher education) and constantly evolving mission of community colleges converge to create unique cultures within these organizations. VanWagoner (2018) characterized community college culture as "subject to ambiguity" since they attempt to balance tradition and hierarchical structure with "currents and cross-currents of change" that can be confounding (n. pag.).

Community colleges can work to shape their culture, particularly for newly hired employees as they learn about the mission and goals of the organization (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013; Phelan, 2015; VanWagoner, 2018).

Leaders can engage in "ongoing cultural cultivation" to foster communication and collaboration across campus (Phelan, 2016, n. pag.), but heavy workloads and competing interests can have a siloing, divisive effect that fractures the organization's cohesiveness. Recent work by the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program on leading internal transformational change recommends important steps for reorienting a campus' culture around student success: (a) "communicate a vision and create urgency"; (b) "build college-wide ownership for change"; (c) "align structures and resources"; (d) "build a system to support disciplined execution"; (e) "establish routines of inquiry and evidence use"; and (f) "create routines of effective communication" (*Leading*, n.d.). These practices, along with the key strategies discussed later in this literature review, have transformational potential but require significant time commitments from campus members engaging in collaboratively leading organizational change.

## *Organizational Change and Transformational Leadership*

### *Definition and Types of Organizational Change*

Drawing from prior theories (Damanpour & Evan, 1984; Zaltman & Duncan, 1977), Bess and Dee (2008) defined changes as alterations or innovations impacting an organization's operations, behaviors, and thinking. Within colleges and universities, change may be “intentional acts where a particular leader drives or implements a new direction” (Kezar, 2018, p. xii). Change tends to be classified as either transformational or incremental, depending on the timeframe and scope of changes. Transformational change happens in different timeframes, but regardless of how long it takes, the end result is "a major overhaul of the organization's structure and strategy" (Bess & Dee, 2008, p. 796). As the name suggests, incremental change has a long timeframe during which "bit-by-bit" (Bess & Dee, 2008, p. 796) or bit-by-byte changes slowly occur without a clear vision but sometimes resulting in a fundamentally changed organization (Keller, 1983; Lindblom, 1959).

Another distinction related to change pertains to intentionality--whether it is planned or emergent (Bess & Dee, 2008). Planned change occurs when leaders and campus members recognize weak organizational practices or external incentives (be they cultural, political, or financial) and decide to attempt alterations or innovations to adapt accordingly (Bennis, Benne, & Chin, 1961; Eckel et al., 1998). Emergent change occurs when colleges implement important adaptations without integrating those improvements into the overarching organizational strategy and structure (Spender & Grinner, 1995). Higher education institutions can engage in national reform efforts (Poindexter, 2003), but even important changes are emergent if they are not intentionally tied to an institution's broader vision and strategic plan.

Community colleges can improve their institutions and make significant improvements in their student outcomes when they undertake transformational change. Indian River State College and Miami Dade College, both located in Florida, were jointly awarded the 2019 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence for successful developmental course redesigns (Miami Dade College), clear transfer pathways (Indian River State College and Miami Dade College), and redesigned advising (Indian River State College), to name only a few important reforms one or both implemented (*The 2019*, 2019). Columbus State Community College, located in Ohio, built data capacity to foster greater accountability for institutional effectiveness and learning outcomes, as well as to track equity gaps – transformational changes cited when it won the 2019 Leah Meyer Austin Award (*Columbus*, 2019). Columbus State Community College shared this award with Amarillo College (Texas), which confronted high levels of poverty in its community by meeting students’ noncognitive needs, building employment pipelines from degrees into jobs, and improving data literacy on campus to foster data-informed decision making (*Amarillo*, 2019). These are but some of the most recently recognized community colleges to successfully undertake transformational change (Stout, 2016; Wyner, 2014).

### *Transformational Change*

Transformational change, the focus of this dissertation study, is intentional about the change process and therefore should be classified as planned change. Since their important 2002 article on transformational change, Kezar and Eckel (both collaboratively and independently) have continued studying transformational change, and their later findings (Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Kezar, 2003; Holcombe & Kezar, 2018) have validated their initial approach to transformational leadership. However, in later studies Kezar and Eckel only focused on one to two of the five interrelated strategies they set forth in 2002. Kezar and Eckel did not explicitly approach their

research from the vantage of developing and validating their theory of transformational change, but readers synthesizing their findings with those of their 2002 article gain a more comprehensive understanding of this theoretical approach to transformational change.

Leadership remained a cornerstone of transformational change in Kezar and Eckel's research. Kezar (2003) found executive support for transformational change was crucial, particularly for presidents of smaller institutions (private four-year universities and community colleges). When leading transformational change around important issues like campus diversity, presidents benefit from integrating themselves into a "web of activities," in which they build relationships, facilitate dialogue, and ease conflict and resistance (Kezar et al 2008b). Presidents need to launch transformational change at their institutions, but this change process works best when presidents then delegate leadership and install or commission infrastructure to be put in place (Kezar & Holcombe, 2019). Shared leadership, grassroots leadership (Kezar, 2009), or distributed leadership (Kezar, 2011): the names for and approaches to collaborative models of leadership vary, but in each model presidents engage campus members at all levels of the organization to take ownership of and actively contribute to the transformational change process.

Kezar and Eckel's research also reiterated their initial findings (2002) that how leaders plan to structure transformational change remains important. In cases where grassroots leadership is strong, scaling change happens organically through campus members deliberating and discussing, forming networks, and benefitting from incentives for their work (Kezar, 2011). Engaging external perspectives to inform the transformational change through an open-systems process builds urgency and consensus (Eckel & Kezar, 2003). Presidents need to account for their organization's institutional context and knowledge capacity (the human capital and level of training and experience of campus members) since these factors impact how leaders build

structures for the change process (Kezar et al., 2008). Beyond organizational resources and context, leaders also need to consider political dimensions to the structure they build; how they build support for change and address resistance to change impacts the likelihood of transformational change being successful (Kezar, 2008).

Kezar and Eckel's later research has affirmed the importance of culture and climate amid transformational change, and the impact of sensemaking and sensegiving in guiding the change process. Campus members' mental models (their underlying assumptions about their roles and their institution) impact their responses to and willingness to participate in change (Holcombe & Kezar, 2018). Over time, colleges and universities form *institutional* logics, or set of values driving behavior and decisions; institutional logics can be challenged and changed over time, but this takes strategy, intentionality, reason, and persistence (Kezar & Bernstein-Sierra, 2020). Without making explicit people's mental models through engagement and dialogue (Holcombe & Kezar, 2018), they are likely to feel isolated and respond to change from the limited perspective of their respective department or team (Kezar & Elrod, 2015; Kezar & Sam, 2014).

Since campus culture and climate affect how successful transformational change can be (Kezar & Eckel 2002b), this suggests leaders should engage in sensemaking to frame change around the campus-wide goal of increased student success and deploy sensemaking teams with their chosen change structure to generate creative ideas and support for the transformational change occurring on campus (Kezar, 2013; Lester & Kezar, 2012). Campus leaders and sensemaking teams can host stakeholder dialogues to allow campus members forums for raising their concerns, asking questions, connecting their needs with those of others across campus departments and units, and finding opportunities to contribute to the change process (Kezar, 2011).

Kezar and Eckel's (2002) research findings are supported by other important research and theory publications on transformational leadership in higher education. Leadership is needed when complex problems exist without intuitive responses, and leaders need to "oversee a sustained period of social disequilibrium" wherein they help their personnel define the problem, focus on viable changes that can be made, and mobilize their personnel to enact those adaptive changes (Heifetz, 1994, pp. 127-128). True transformational change occurs across entire organizations (Hoggan & Browning, 2019), which accounts for why exemplary executive leadership is crucial. A key responsibility amid the change process is to "envision solutions to organizational issues that plague college campuses" (Manning, 2013, p. 9). Effective transformational change in higher education is long-term and nonlinear, and it benefits from lateral thinking--"acting deliberately so as to free ourselves from orthodox approaches" to problems amid change (Buller, 2015, p. 132). The literature on transformational change outside of Kezar and Eckel's work emphasizes the need for leaders to use creative and dynamic approaches to break impasses and chart paths forward toward transformational change.

Research on cultural shifts amid transformational change also support Kezar and Eckel's (2002) theory. Given the disequilibrium campuses experience amid change, campus members can feel unsettled and threatened (Heifetz, 1994). Organizational change tends to outpace cultural change (VanWagoner, 2018), with cultural change oftentimes taking at least a decade. Emphasizing the change process as a "voyage of discovery" can reassure campus members that their unsettled feeling is natural since they are venturing into uncharted territory (Buller, 2015). Leaders can strengthen their organizational culture amid change by identifying internal contradictions; reiterating the organization's character and identity; facilitating and supporting change across campus; and regularly communicating (Tierney, 2011). In all of these cases,

leaders are carefully guiding their organizational culture toward one that is empowered, adaptable, and interconnected. According to Kezar and Eckel (2002), organizational culture is positioned to change when college leaders adopt five key strategies for transformational change and guide sensemaking amid the change process.

*Five Strategies of Transformational Change in Community College Literature*

Kezar and Eckel (2002) identified five strategies that drive transformational change in higher education: senior administrative support, collaborative leadership, robust design, staff development, and visible action. According to Kezar and Eckel, these strategies need to happen in tandem for transformational change to occur. Transformational change is not a linear process, so the order of strategies below should not be mistaken for a set sequence of how the change process works. For each strategy, a description of community college research on the topic is summarized and synthesized.

Senior administrative support.

Senior community college leaders are important starting points for transformative change (Person & Thibeault, 2016), particularly since they are responsible for casting a vision of to what transformational change will lead and establishing accountability (McNair, Bensimon & Malcom-Piqueux, 2020; Rodicio, Mayer, & Jenkins, 2014). For this reason, Kotter's change model (2012) is oftentimes references in resources by national organizations such as the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program (*Leading*, n.d.). They can draw from past experiences at prior institutions they have worked – a practice especially prevalent among new presidents (McNair, 2015). Grounding their vision in an urgency for change (particularly when the threat of market competition looms) serves as a strong impetus for committing to transformational change (Baer & Duin, 2014; Wyner, 2014). Urgency without agency is dangerous, though. Senior

leaders need to operate under the assumption that the challenges their organizations face are opportunities in which they can adapt (Kadlec & Rowlett, 2014; Littlepage et al., 2018).

Having established a vision for transformational change, senior leaders then have to make the case for transformative vision to their campus members (Stout, 2016). How senior leaders frame and communicate the urgency for transformational change impacts campus members' response to the charge for help (Kadlec & Rowlett, 2014; A. Knight, 2014; Nausieda, 2014). Part of framing change entails differentiating between internal and external change, and conveying a belief that the organization can change and has senior leaders' support throughout (Martinez, 2018; Stout, 2016). Providing a coherent narrative of the transformational change process simplifies the complexities that might otherwise seem confounding to campus members (Stout, 2016). If senior leaders can successfully make the case for the urgency around transformational change (Stout, 2016), they are more likely to secure the buy-in of their campus members (Torres et al., 2013).

Having conveyed the urgency for transformational change, senior leaders need to delegate to campus members at all levels to drive transformative change efforts on campus (Orians & Bergerson, 2014). Senior leaders can strategically form working groups to engage in work designed to lead to transformative change (Person & Thibeault, 2016). They can empower working groups by modeling how to lead through data-driven decision making (Dejean et al., 2018). Investments in data systems, along with hiring and developing institutional researchers, can convey deep commitment to building an evidence-based culture (Baer, Duin, & Bushway, 2015). Data can be a powerful tool for driving institutional improvement, but data can also demoralize if senior leaders use data to "bludgeon rather than engage" (Kadlec & Rowlett, 2014,

p. 92). Instead, senior leaders can leverage their student success vision and institutional data to launch collaborative leadership.

#### Collaborative leadership.

As discussed above, transformational change begins with senior leaders, who in turn have the responsibility of structuring collaboration to empower their campus members like mid-level managers (Amey et al, 2020; Beckley, 2020). The types and forms of this structure can vary: multitiered (Klempin & Karp, 2018), cross-sectional (Rodicio, Mayer, & Jenkins, 2014), and cross-representational (Klein, 2017), to cite only those explicitly named in recent research on transformative change at community colleges. These different forms of collaboration all have a dislodging effect, razing silos and melting inertia by facilitating horizontal movement (between departments) and vertical movement (scaling the organizational hierarchy) alike. Whatever the structure selected by senior leaders, it needs to be centered on the shared vision for transformational change forged by senior leaders (Klempin & Karp, 2018; Rodicio, Mayer, & Jenkins, 2014). The initial focus may be internal change, but the collaborative structure should allow for external collaboration with community partners and colleagues at other institutions (Boerner, 2016).

The structure senior leaders implement should foster not only collaboration but also relationship formation and communication, setting the stage for cultural change. Increased collaboration reduced the loosely-coupled nature of higher education at a particular institution by connecting units that have not always worked closely together (Klein, 2017; Martinez, 2018; Weick, 1976). Collaboration goes beyond productivity since it allows relationship formation to occur across campus, spurring ad hoc groups, workgroup and research partnerships, and a healthier campus community (Kadlec & Rowlett, 2014; Moore, 2014).

Erecting and cultivating a collaborative structure is challenging but builds the capacity integral to transformational change. Cultural change is slow, but it begins making positive developments once collaboration is possible and routine (Rodicio, Mayer, & Jenkins, 2014), a key prerequisite for pursuing increased student success (Kadlec & Rowlett, 2014). When implemented properly, a collaborative structure empowers campus members to be change agents (Gambino, 2017). As change agents, institutional researchers, student supports staff and faculty can begin evaluating policies and practices based on key outcome metrics and developing reforms and interventions to increase student success (Brock, Mayer, & Rutschow, 2016; Stout, 2016). A collaborative structure also allows campus members to better fulfill the "civic imperative" by more effectively working in and supporting under-resourced communities (Moore, 2014). As collaborative leadership strengthens, having been commissioned and empowered by senior administrative support, transformational change gains cultural support but needs to be supplemented with robust design to fully operationalize the change process.

#### Robust design.

Robust design is the least well defined of the five change strategies, but it manifests in four practices: institutional learning, cultural and capacity issues, goals and metrics, and a change model. Institutional learning is a precursor to robust design since it enables campus members to identify upcoming challenges with implementation efforts, such as Guttman Community College's rollout of iPass [Integrated Planning and Advising for Student Success, an initiative focused on how student support tools impact the student experience] (Gambino, 2017; Martinez, 2018). To prepare for transformational change, institutional learning encompasses exploration: identifying problems, forming hypotheses about those problems, and developing randomized controlled trials (Brock, Mayer, & Rutschow, 2016). Institutional learning enables campus

members to identify "systemic imbalance" (Littlepage et al., 2018), an overly ambitious change plan that does not account for human capital limitations (workloads, initiative fatigue, fear of change, and more) (Kadlec & Rowlett, 2014). Paying too much attention to campus context, distrusting data and research, intracampus competition, misunderstandings among stakeholders about institutional priorities, and fear and mistrust can all impede organizational change and learning (Kezar & Holcombe, 2019).

Planning for transformational change by gathering input from campus members allows senior leaders to anticipate and avoid roadblocks to accomplishing goals (Kezar, Dizon, & Scott, 2019; Rodicio, Mayer, & Jenkins, 2014). Failing to account for campus members' morale and capacity limitations risks resistance to and objections against transformative change being attempted (Kadlec & Rowlett, 2014). To avoid these pitfalls, senior leaders can build a "strong basis of support" among campus members to propel transformational change (Klempin & Klein, 2018, p. 100). As they avoid roadblocks and map a clear path forward, senior leaders found a culture of planning, defined by campus members' commitment to evidence-based reform efforts.

Being reform-minded necessitates designing clear goals and outcome metrics. Transformational change is more likely to occur when colleges align their change efforts with clear outcomes with set deadlines, then assess results based on metrics for change that would indicate the extent of progress achieved (Ashcraft & Jacobsen, 2017; Viggiani & Szczerbacki, 2015). Once goals are set, community colleges can identify what analytics they will use to track their progress, assess policies and practices using the selected metrics, and work toward a reform-focused climate (Ashcraft & Jacobsen, 2017; Baer & Duin, 2014; Brock, Mayer, & Rutschow, 2016; Torres et al., 2013). Changed policies and procedures are indicators of

transformational change occurring, as they tend to influence people's behavior and perceptions (Brock, Mayer, & Rutschow, 2016).

Seniors leaders can set clear goals for transformational change by developing and sharing a change model with their campus members. A key task for them is to present a "strong theory of change and concrete program logic model" tied to the institution or state education system's mission statement (Person & Thibeault, 2016, p. 86; see also Yob et al., 2016). These goals should be forward-facing, but when they leverage existing tools and practices they honor existing efforts to serve students while enhancing how those tools and practices are employed (Person & Thibeault, 2016). Adopting a change model with a clear set of steps seems ideal (Shane, Carson, & Edward, 2018), but the reality is that change is linear and requires senior leaders and campus members to be adaptable amid transformational change (Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Stout, 2016). As robust designs for transformational change are implemented, gaps in staff's ability become apparent, creating opportunities to invest in staff development in order to strengthen the change designed while also increasing campus members' abilities and skill-sets.

#### Staff development.

Transformational change can excel once campus members have necessary skills and competencies, but acquiring these abilities takes time and sometimes requires extensive professional development. Major changes compel community colleges to provide comprehensive and long-term professional development, as Montgomery County Community College and the California Acceleration Project did for faculty teaching developmental courses (Hern & Snell, 2014; Stout, 2016). Beyond expertise-specific professional development, community colleges also have to provide skill-building and cross-training to campus members to expand their

expertise (Gambino, 2017; Haley, McCambly, & Graham, 2018; McCambly & Haley, 2016; Terosky & Conway, 2020).

Data literacy is one of the foremost skill sets campus members need to gain through staff development. Campus culture is ready to be data-driven when key campus members have the training needed to read, understand, and take action on data (Dejean et al., 2018; Honda, 2018). Data-literate campus members are able to facilitate conversation around data and pose plausible interpretations of said data (Honda, 2018). Increased data literacy can lead to turf wars over "data ownership" (Honda, 2018), so it is well for community colleges to democratize campus data as collectively owned, and something for which everyone is responsible.

Campuses strengthen a culture of inquiry as more campus members acquire operational data literacy, the ability to interpret data and then alter policies and practices to increase student success. A culture of inquiry emerges when campus members engage in self-initiated professional development (reading current literature, engaging in reflective practice, participating in active professional organizations, and publishing) and begin identifying and implementing needed changes (as opposed to having interventions always imposed from senior leaders) (A. Knight, 2014; Person & Thibeault, 2016).

Needed changes for staff development expand beyond immediate student outcomes (like course completion) to include understanding and supporting students' holistic needs like expressing their intersectional identities (Haley, McCambly, & Graham, 2018). Building capacity around equity entails staff development enabling campus members to understand and effectively engage with diverse individuals both as people and as students; such training was not widely available when campus members were completing their studies and eventually beginning their careers at community colleges (Alemán, 2018; Shmulsky & Gobbo, 2019). Campus

members achieve a sense of agency as they find themselves embedded within a culture of evidence, seeing firsthand the roadblocks to student success and empowered to devise and implement equity-focused solutions to those roadblocks. These campus members are capable of leading community change and altering plans for transformational change as things deviate from what was planned (Person & Thibeault, 2016; Torres et al., 2013). As actions like staff development, robust design for change, and leadership engagement gain momentum, they all need to be visible in order to maximize their impact.

#### Visible action.

Of the five strategies for transformational change identified by Kezar & Eckel (2002), visible action appeared the least within recent literature on transformational change at community colleges. Visible action was achieved through two practices when it did appear in the literature: communication and data use. Work around highly complex change like implementing pathways needed constant, continuous, "[t]ransparent and open" communication (Rodicio, Mayer & Jenkins, 2014, p. 71). Communication needs to provide a "clear understanding" of the problem being addressed (Brock, Mayer, & Rutschow, 2016, p. 32), allowing senior leaders and campus members to devote the proper amount of time and resources to enacting change in line with institutional vision (Klempin & Karp, 2018). Using data and analytics to highlight visible action—problems needing to be addressed and progress made as evidenced by outcome metrics—is important when confronting issues such as early momentum and reforming the developmental education pipeline (Baer & Duin, 2014; Hern & Snell, 2014). Without clear signs of change underway, campus members may presume the presiding institutional logic remains in place and unchallenged (Kezar & Bernstein-Sierra, 2020).

What campus members hear from leaders and see happening on campus affects how they understand, or make sense of, the changes happening around them. Transformational change is most effective when senior leaders engage in sensemaking themselves while launching the change process, and also in guiding campus members' thinking about change using and messaging about the strategies just described.

### *Sensemaking amid Transformational Change*

Sensemaking occurs not only with visible action but also with the other four key strategies for transformational change identified by Kezar and Eckel (2002). Senior leaders engage in sensemaking when they survey the landscape around their community college, assess the organizational and cultural areas needing to change to best meet the changing needs of the community, and how to undertake transformational change to meet those needs. Sensemaking spreads when senior leaders delegate leadership responsibilities and begin collaboratively designing the steps to be taken during the change process with their campus members. The frame from which staff development is delivered (e.g., an emphasis on student success) can reinforce the sensegiving offered by senior leaders to their campus members. During transformational change, sensemaking functions as the critical cognitive process wherein campus members (including senior leadership) draw from past experiences and their understanding of institutional culture to critique proposed or pending changes and determine to what extent they will try to help or hinder the change process.

According to Eddy (who drew from Weick and Senge, two major figures who have shaped sensemaking theory), "Times of uncertainty and change provide ripe opportunities for leaders to help campus members make sense of new events and to connect new information with past experiences" (p. 64). Weick (1995) proposed seven properties associated with sensemaking:

(1) identity construction (based on past and present roles); (2) retrospection (critical thinking about change); (3) enactment (actions and routines formed during change); (4) social interaction (how communication occurs amid change); (5) ongoing sensemaking (initial meaning derived, with input from leaders and mentors); (6) extracted cues (altered thinking and action based on finding patterns and new norms amid change); and (7) the balance of plausibility and accuracy (forming new expectations as change takes hold). Early in the change process, people are evaluating how sound those proposed or new changes appear to be based on their experiences and institutional values. Once they accept the appropriateness (or perhaps the inevitability) of change, they turn to reshaping their thinking and actions to adapt accordingly.

Weick's (1995) work on sensemaking is supplemented by Senge (1990), whose concepts of mental maps and organizational learning provide a deeper understanding of the mental processes happening with campus members amid transformational change. On an individual level, organizational change (and subsequent cultural change) challenges campus members' mental maps, the cognitive heuristics people naturally develop over time to essentially automate their response to changes as they encounter new phenomena (see also Eddy, 2010). On a campus level, organizational learning compounds people's various mental maps and impacts culture at large. When senior leaders begin helping campus members evolve their mental map, organizational learning shifts from feeling swept up in external change to having the agency to drive internal change that reaches the external community in time.

Research on sensemaking amid the transformational change process at community colleges has been shaped largely by Pamela Eddy, with other researchers making important contributions to the field. Eddy (2003; 2005) found that how leaders frame change impacts how their campus members understand and respond to those changes. A filtering process of meaning

amid change will inevitably occur (whereby campus members arrive at different understandings based on their past experiences coloring their perceptions about the change at hand), but the initial framing of change offered by leaders can limit misunderstandings (Eddy, 2006). By accounting for their organization's history or sage (Clark, 1972), leaders can anticipate when and how they will need to interact with campus members, framing and conveying information at appropriate times (Eddy, 2010).

Other researchers in addition to Eddy have found that sensemaking is tied to outcomes related to changes in policy and practice. Like Eddy, Hamilton (2016) found that how leaders frame change can guide campus members' thinking and mobilize their support. Golden & Badway (2015) found that campus members like faculty can function as "tempered radicals," change agents who have critically evaluated the change and determined they are willing to work to support it. Chase (2016) identified the dynamics of power and race at work amid change in relation to policy implementation, with equity being a significant concern among campus members. Mokher et al (2019) found that communication and dialogue strengthen the sensemaking process, but they do not alleviate fear and concern that reform efforts may be misguided and ineffectual. For sensemaking to be effective, it needs to address campus members' priorities and values (e.g., equity) and garner their commitment to lead aspects of the change process.

Besides helping researchers and practitioners understand how sensemaking guides the evolution of campus members' mental maps, sensemaking also illuminates the inner workings of cultural shifts amid the transformational change process. Since cultural shifts are slow and can take as long as a decade to fully materialize (Phelan, 2015), it would be easy to overlook subtle shifts and changes in campus culture. Researchers applying sensemaking theory ask research

participants to reflectively account for these shifts, a “meta-sensemaking” process wherein research participants form narratives synthesizing how their own campus maps have evolved and how organizational learning has impacted campus culture at large. Given transformational change’s nonlinear nature, sensemaking helps campus members sort through the changes and formulate a coherent explanation of the change process from their perspective.

Sensemaking would benefit from being applied in long-term studies spanning a number of years (perhaps around ten, given estimates of the time it takes for cultural changes to take root) (VanWagoner, 2018). Sensemaking tends to be applied in a “point-in-time” manner, as qualitative researchers commonly use the theory to focus case studies that last for a limited time. That this happens is to be expected, as longitudinal qualitative studies oftentimes require extensive resources not always at researchers’ disposal. Finding ways and resources to allow for longitudinal studies of sensemaking amid change would capture a more comprehensive picture of how organizational culture evolves, but shorter-term studies (such as the study proposed for this dissertation) nonetheless offer important insights into the change process and campus members’ evolving thinking during that process.

### **Focus of Study**

As this literature review on transformational change and sensemaking demonstrates (see above), community colleges have implemented promising reforms and initiatives in recent years that have had a transformational impact (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010; Wyner et al., 2016). What is less clear is how community colleges planned for transformational change across the entire institution and beyond a single initiative like guided pathways or developmental education reform. Further, how community colleges seek to strengthen the health of their organizational culture through practices like sensemaking has not been thoroughly explored in studies of

transformational change. Finally, the ways in which community colleges manage the nonlinear change process using key interrelated strategies for transformational change has not yet been thoroughly studied. Transformational change stands to enable community colleges to leverage various initiatives, reorient campus culture around student success, and align efforts and resources, but this has not been sufficiently explored in higher education research. How community colleges plan for and undergo planned transformational change while addressing their culture has yet to be investigated using rigorous research methods, likely due to constant pressure to start new initiatives without carefully linking them to existing efforts (Phelan, 2015).

The purpose of this study is to explore how community colleges plan for and undertake transformational change, using sensemaking throughout the process. I sought to answer three research questions through this study:

How are community colleges operationalizing the five key strategies Kezar and Eckel identified to undertake the change process of building institutional capacity?

How are these community colleges' leaders and core teams undergoing sensemaking amid the change process of building institutional capacity?

To what extent are these community colleges interweaving the five key strategies Kezar and Eckel identified as they [the community colleges] undertake the change process of building institutional capacity?

The research questions guiding this study explicitly integrate Kezar and Eckel's (2002) findings about how institutions of higher education successfully lead transformational change. The research questions sought to test and validate Kezar and Eckel's theory of transformational change by applying it in the unique context of the community college field.

## Summary

This literature review demonstrated the importance of transformational leadership in enabling community colleges to build institutional capacity, unify reform efforts, and improve student success. Community colleges are using the five strategies for transformational change espoused by Kezar and Eckel (2002), though these strategies generally are not done in a coordinated and intentional way, which limits the impact these strategies can have in accomplishing whole-college transformational change. This literature review also identified a tendency for researchers and practitioners to focus on showcasing promising practices being implemented rather than using rigorous research methods to validate the impact and importance of those promising practices.

The literature discussed indicates that sensemaking is an important practice to occur during transformational change, as it guides campus members' perceptions of changes and sets the stage for organizational culture changes. As senior leaders contemplate launching transformational change, the meaning they form around that change impacts how the change process is planned for and implemented. Having engaged in sensemaking themselves, senior leaders have the task of sensegiving, guiding campus members' thinking about the change process as they (senior leaders) appoint and empower campus members to collaboratively lead and guide aspects of the change process. Facilitating conversations between different units that are contextualized with institutional data provide an important starting point for generating urgency for change and garnering buy-in for coming changes.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In this chapter I outline the methods I used for this multi-site case study. It begins with an overview of the multiple case study design and site selection criteria for the research sites. It then transitions to how I collected data (analysis of 2019 Aspen Prize applications from colleges participating in this study, as well as interviews with participating colleges' presidents and two to three key campus members who have led transformational change efforts), followed by how I analyzed these data (transcription, categorical analysis, memoing, and comparative analysis). It concludes with an account of my positionality as a researcher and the limitations of this study.

Between defending my dissertation proposal and conducting research for this study, I had to change my research methods due to the onset of coronavirus (COVID-19). I initially planned to conduct on-site research from late March to the middle of April 2020, which coincided precisely with the nationwide closing of college campuses as they transitioned to remote learning. In consultation with my dissertation committee, I decided to digitize my study, allowing for "socially distanced data collection" that still explored transformational change at community colleges without imposing health risks for myself as a researcher or the college members I hoped to meet in person. This decision was also made after reflecting on the unprecedented challenges presidents and their leadership teams faced: strengthening remote learning, coping with declines in enrollment, anticipating or experiencing significant cuts in funding, and more.

The changes in methodology moved the study away from replicating Kezar and Eckel's (2002) methods, but these changes still allowed me to explore transformational change with community colleges that have successfully undergone the process. There was no end to the pandemic in sight at the time I had to decide how to proceed. This study was unfunded and

therefore could not wait indefinitely to proceed. My decision to move forward with changed methods created new limitations to the study, which are described below. As detailed in later chapters of this dissertation, this study still yielded important findings regarding the transformational change process.

## **Methodology**

### *Multiple case study design*

For this dissertation, I chose to study the change process at multiple sites, and thus conduct a multiple site case study of the change process. Every organization is unique based on its mission, resources, culture, and history (Bolman & Deal, 2013). As a result, change inevitably manifests in widely different ways between organizations. The variation between colleges undergoing the change process necessitates studying a wider bounded system or unit of analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) – in this case, multiple community colleges.

For their study, Kezar and Eckel (2002) identified their multiple case study sites by reviewing documents from twenty-six (26) institutions participating in the ACE Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation, a project funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation for five and a half years to support institutional transformation. Drawing from Bergquist (1992) and Levy and Merry (1986), Kezar and Eckel (2002) provided a rationale for studying the change process at multiple sites: "Having a variety of institutional types was . . . important in order to determine how institutional context might impact the transformation change process since institutional type affects incremental change processes" (p. 300).

Following Kezar and Eckel (2002), I selected multiple case study sites to capture variation between colleges undertaking the transformation change process. Of the twenty-six colleges, only six demonstrated sufficient evidence of transformational change occurring to merit

being invited to participate in Kezar and Eckel's (2002) study. Kezar and Eckel (2002) then included only two of the six institutions in their published article. I conducted case studies at three community colleges, using each institution's being a 2019 Aspen Prize finalist as an indicator of having achieved transformational change.

Selecting multiple case study sites to study the transformation change process created the opportunity for thick description (Denzin, 2001), which Eddy's qualitative research on sensemaking amid change (2003; 2005; 2006; 2010) has shown to illuminate various ways the change process can occur. According to Denzin (2001), thick description captures "lived experience" presented with "detail and density"—in this case, thoroughly depicting the complexities colleges, their leaders, and their campus members all experience during the change process. Denzin (2001) admitted thick description is inherently subjective in that the researcher imposes interpretation through the very selection of which details to include and how to cast them. Nonetheless, thick description's potential to get to "the heart of what is being interpreted" and the conceptual structures impacting people's actions and perceptions (Geertz, 1973, p. 18).

Conducting a multiple site case study to collect data yielded thick description of the change process and allowed me to answer my research questions. In this dissertation, I sought to understand how colleges operationalize change, make sense of the change being undertaken, and interweave the five key strategies for change Kezar and Eckel (2002) identified. As noted in the limitations section, the purposeful nonprobability sampling used for this multiple site case study is not nationally representative of all community colleges in the United States. Nonetheless, studying multiple sites for this case study allowed for a deeper and richer understanding of the unique ways in which colleges undertake, experience, and perceive transformative change.

*Site selection*

To select sites for this study, I used a combination of purposeful nonprobability sampling and criterion-based selection in keeping with my multiple case study design. Purposeful nonprobability sampling provides the opportunity to explore unique phenomena at specific sites (Patton, 2015). Criterion-based selection helped pinpoint sites with unique phenomena (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). Combining purposeful nonprobability sampling with criterion-based selection led to selecting information-rich cases, "those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry" (Patton, 2015, p. 53).

To perform purposeful nonprobability sampling, I selected sites based on the same transformative change criteria Kezar and Eckel (2002) used for their site selection. Drawing from Rajagopalan & Spreitzer (1996), Kezar and Eckel (2002) noted that teleological models of change hinge on the assumption that organizations are "purposeful and adaptive" (p. 297). For organizations, purpose and adaptability materialize through activities like planning, assessment, incentives and rewards, strategy, restructuring, and goal formation (Burns, 1996; Kezar & Eckel, 2002).

Beyond framing site selection on the assumptions outlined above, I also applied the same criteria Kezar & Eckel (2002) used to identify sites where transformational change is being attempted:

- (1) change goes all the way to core values, assumptions, and behavior at the center of the college;
- (2) change is all-encompassing;
- (3) change is intentional; and
- (4) change is oriented toward the long term.

Since transformative change manifests in different ways, I complemented the purposeful nonprobability sampling practices outlined above with criterion-based selection around major factors known to impact community colleges: (1) their regional location in the United States (e.g., Northeast, Midwest) and (2) enrollment and student diversity. Where a college is located is also important, as regional differences, geography, and proximity affect opportunities available to students (Hlinka, 2017). The size and diversity of a student body on campus have important implications for that campus' funding, culture, and outcomes (Crosta, 2014).

I selected sites for my study by completing two important steps. First, I identified community colleges that were finalists for or winners of the 2019 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, which is comprised of ten (10) community colleges. Once I obtained a shortlist of potential case study sites, I finalized sites by selecting three colleges with varying presidential tenures and geographic locations and student demographics to invite to participate in this study (see above). These steps combined purposeful nonprobability sampling with criterion-based selection to reach thick description of the transformative change process at very different community colleges (Denzin, 1989; Eddy, 2003). Three sites allowed for this study to resemble the number of institutions studied by Kezar and Eckel (2002) and variation between community colleges that have undergone transformational change and been nationally recognized for their efforts through the 2019 Aspen Prize.

### *Data collection and analysis*

#### *Data collection*

Reaching thick description necessitates an array of qualitative data (Patton, 2015). Kezar and Eckel (2002) achieved this through a variety of qualitative data collection techniques. First, they commissioned participant-observers at research sites to complete open-ended

questionnaires. During their site visits, Kezar and Eckel (2002) conducted interviews, observed meetings, attended campus events, and conducted informal observations." They were purposeful in targeting "key individuals" associated with the change process: administrators, faculty, and staff (Kezar & Eckel, 2002, p. 301). I had to adapt Kezar and Eckel's research methods due to the onset of COVID-19, which obstructed plans to collect data in-person. I adjusted my research methods to still allow for thick description of qualitative data around the change process to be presented without overburdening college members during the pandemic (Denzin, 2001).

#### *2019 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence Applications*

I began data analysis with participating colleges' 2019 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence applications. These applications are comprised of two primary things: descriptive statistics demonstrating longitudinal gains in student success as well as a qualitative narrative describing how the change process occurred. The descriptive statistics provided are valuable in illustrating the ways each college served its minoritized and historically underserved groups of students more effectively. These groups count on community colleges to provide not only access but also well-designed supports in and out of the classroom for them to be successful. The value of these descriptive statistics is enhanced by the change narratives, which provide a concise narrative of how community colleges made important changes that enabled them to achieve the student success illustrated by their descriptive statistics.

#### *Interviews with Presidents/CEOs and Chancellors*

I engaged in various data collection techniques, beginning with presidents and chancellors. One of the most important data sources were direct interviews with the campus president or chancellor. These interviews provided crucial data to testing the validity of Kezar and Eckel's (2002) findings, as the president or chancellor is central to implementing and

interrelating the five key strategies for transformative change, and she or he also is instrumental in how sensemaking occurs amid the change process. Researchers approach interviews with executives in different ways. Some treat interviews as opportunities to glean insights from and foster dialogue among leaders whose learning and expertise offer clear guideposts for future generations of leaders and practitioners (Rothwell, Gerity, & Carraway, 2017). Others have asked executive participating in interviews to form “narrative counterstories” that disrupt executives’ traditional stories by accounting for conflict, groups whose priorities or needs were under- or unaddressed, and shortcomings in leadership and the change process (Santamaría, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In this case, my study sought to both learn and challenge executives’ perspectives. This was attempted by both learning about what happened during the change process while also challenging executives to critically reflect on how sensemaking occurred and what might have been done differently.

Change management literature indicates leaders play a central role in transformative leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Kezar, 2014). Eddy's research (2003; 2005; 2010) has demonstrated the importance and impact of presidents' sense-giving efforts amid the change process. The semi-structured interviews I conducted with presidents will explore how they have implemented the change process, engaged in sensemaking themselves, and conducted sense-giving to their campus members. My semi-structured approach to interviews allowed for me to invite presidents and chancellors to form and share narrative counterstories based on their initial answers of what happened during the change process and their accounts of the sensemaking process.

*Interviews with Campus Members Leading Transformational Change*

Following interviews with presidents and chancellors, I interviewed three college members who have led the transformational change process at their community college. Whereas interviews with executives focused on administrative support and sensemaking from a leadership standpoint, interviews with college members focused more on how collaboration, communication, and making changes visible were done. They also focused on sensemaking, though the focus here shifted to these campus members' gauge of their colleagues' sensemaking shaped their approach to and messaging about the transformational change process underway. College members leading the change process had a unique vantage of and perspective on their institutional culture (Eddy, 2003), which impacted how and when they promote changes in policy and practice alike.

In preparation for interviews with college members, I reviewed Aspen Prize application data (with particular focus on the change narrative), transcripts and notes from my interview with the college president or chancellor, and other documents (public and internal) acquired as part of this study. Some qualitative methodologists recommend multiple interviews with participants to gain a deep understanding of the participants' history and background before delving into the subject of a research study (Forsey, 2012). Given the demanding schedules these campus members keep (most if not all are administrators), this study compressed data collection into one interview with the potential for requesting a second optional interview. Following Kezar and Eckel (2002), semi-structured interviews with college members began with broader questions about transformational change (e.g., Has it happened? What evidence demonstrates it has happened? How did practices change over time?). Having obtained these broader impressions, I honed in on key aspects of the change process and sensemaking, gleaned initially from my

review of the Aspen prize applications and an initial review of documents. These more specific questions allowed for clarification, enriched insights, and new perspectives.

### *Triangulation through Document Analysis*

I also analyzed documents produced during the change process from each community college participating in this study. These documents were not standardized, so there was variety between each research site in terms of documents available for analysis. Types of documents to be analyzed included but were not limited to the following: meeting minutes; official communications; annual reporting to national network membership organizations; and memos (including executive memos). Collecting these various documents allowed me to both deepen my historical knowledge of how the change process occurred at each institution. It also triangulated change narratives from Aspen Prize applications and interviews with colleges (Patton, 2015). As discussed above, information gleaned from an initial review of documents collected positioned me to tailor questions during semi-structured interviews.

I reviewed documents in two phases. Initially, I read through documents from each institution participating in this study, taking notes and memoing about what I learned about the change process as I reviewed them. The goal of this initial reading was to form a preliminary understanding of the change process that informed how I shaped individualized questions during semi-structured interviews. With only one guaranteed interview per participant and the potential for a second interview, it was vital to maximize each interview's value by already having an initial understanding of what happened during the change process. This way, questions could focus more on why the change process happened the way it did, challenges that emerged and were navigated along the way, and cultural shifts that occurred as sensemaking transpired. As

detailed below, I performed a secondary and deeper analysis of these documents after interviews to triangulate Aspen Prize change narratives and interviews in a more comprehensive way.

I produced thick description of the change process at research sites based on the three data collection techniques outlined above (participant-observer questionnaires, interviews with presidents, focus group interviews with campus members, and on-site field notes). I did not need to contact study participants with requests for follow-up interviews via phone or videoconference if needed to obtain clarifying data. These follow-up interviews would have occurred only if I have not yet reached the saturation point of data collection and identify the need to collect additional data to obtain missing information needed to begin the coding and data analysis processes (Hood, 2007; Saldaña, 2015).

#### *Data analysis*

As with data collection methods, I followed Kezar and Eckel's (2002) data analysis techniques to manage the wealth of qualitative data I collected, as having a systematic approach to data analysis was paramount to obtaining valid findings and results (Hays & Singh, 2012). Kezar and Eckel (2002) used categorical analysis and memoing. To build on Kezar and Eckel (2002), I conducted comparative analysis of the change process between different institutions studied in this dissertation. Kezar and Eckel (2002) implicitly completed this comparative analysis, as their findings were a synthesis of insights from both of their research sites. I formally conducted comparative analysis of the different community colleges participating in this study to ground the findings I present in this dissertation (see chapter 5)

Prior to data analysis commencing, I edited all interview data initially transcribed by Zoom, as opposed to hiring transcription services which are more convenient but make it harder to fully “live with the data” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). My edits to the transcription were guided

by Kowal and O'Connell (2014), who addressed important components of transcription researchers should include (orthography, pitch, volume, paralinguistic features, etc.). Including these transcription components, along with reviewing my field notes on interviews, helped protect the transcripts from criticism of transcripts being destabilized texts (Fusco, 2008) or a "masquerade" of natural conversation (Denzin, 1997, 41-42).

Categorical analysis based on careful coding of data was the primary data analysis technique I used to begin interpreting the data I collected. Like Kezar and Eckel (2004), I relied on Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013)'s schemata for coding. To supplement, I also drew from Saldaña (2015) and Thornberg and Charmaz (2014). In particular, Thornberg and Charmaz (2014) provide guidance on the phases of coding: initial or open coding (comparing data and outlining preliminary codes); focused coding (refining initial codes and devising formal categories); and theoretical coding (the fusion of initial and focused codes into a coherent theory).

Saldaña's (2015) coding cycles correspond well with Thornberg and Charmaz's (2014) coding phases, and will provide practical techniques for coding my data. Merging Saldaña's first coding cycle with the initial coding phase provided important exploratory methods (holistic, provisional, and hypothesis coding) to generate initial codes and preliminary metasummary and metasynthesis. I completed focused coding by utilizing Saldaña's second cycle coding methods (pattern, focused, and theoretical coding). I used Saldaña's (2015) guidelines for codeweaving during the theoretical coding phase, as codeweaving is well-suited to generating a coherent theory that I counterbalanced against Kezar and Eckel's (2002) findings about the change process.

I utilized memoing to track the development of my categorical analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). Memoing functions as an important technique for documenting a researcher's experience throughout the research process, which is particularly valuable in allowing researchers to identify, reflect on, and interrogate their subjectivity and how that subjectivity is impacting their interpretation of data (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). Given my intention for memoing, these documents functioned as code memos (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

To focus my code memos, I reflected on the thought process that went into each coding phase (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014) as I used Saldaña's (2015) specific coding techniques, described above. The multi-phase approach to coding I took led to repeated engagement with the data, during which time my understanding of the data and its meaning evolved. Memoing was particularly important after I completed the theoretical coding phase and began counterbalancing my findings against those of Kezar and Eckel (2002). I further reflected on my findings based on the criterion-based selection factors I used to select research sites (presidential tenure, college location, and enrollment and student diversity).

My comparative analysis occurred after the other data analysis techniques described above are completed (at least initially), and reflected on how key factors initially used to select research sites (presidential tenure, college location, and enrollment and diversity) helped inform similarities and differences in how colleges in this study underwent the change process. Falsely attributing causation is a genuine risk when conducting comparative analysis (Dey, 2007). Thus, my comparative analysis was confined to reflecting on variation in change processes between institutions alongside key factors I used to identify research sites, in addition to other factors that

were be associated with change process outcomes (e.g., campus climate). This comparative analysis led to identifying areas for future research.

### **Positionality**

Accounting for one's positionality when conducting qualitative research is important because of the "power relations inherent in the research act itself" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 64). Researchers have the unique opportunity to serve "as witness giving testimony to the lives of others" (Lather, 2007, p. 41), but researchers also conduct their work within a world of inequality due to power and privilege (Madison, 2005; Thomas, 1993). Given this challenging dynamic, researchers need to "[decide] upon the relationship of the researcher to the researched," which "is one of the fundamental considerations that researchers must make as they embark upon their work" (Jones, Torres, & Armino, 2014, p. 27).

I identify as white heterosexual male. I was born in the eastern United States into a lower-class family in an age of consumerism, neoliberalism, and increasing inequality, the wonders and woes of which manifested in tangible ways throughout my childhood. I am a first-generation college student. These traits and experiences both help me understand the need for student success (first-generation) and compel me to scrutinize my analysis for unintentional bias based on my privilege. I drew from equity-minded literature on leadership and culture to counteract bias as I conduct data analysis (Bensimon, & Malcom-Piqueux, 2020; Patton, 2016; Welton, Owens & Zamani-Gallaher, 2018).

I chose to begin my professional career in central North Carolina as an English instructor, having earned degrees in English at a liberal arts college. It was at a community college that I committed my professional life to the community college field, inspired and moved as I was by the people I met who came as students to further their education. I chose to pursue a doctoral

degree and transitioned into a graduate assistant role. I worked for Envisioning Excellence for Community College Leadership, a budding initiative which has since expanded into the Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research. Our change model hinged on developing future community college leaders able to successfully navigate the current and coming challenges. My current position is at Achieving the Dream, a national nonprofit network of over 300 community colleges that drives increased student success through institutional capacity building.

As a doctoral candidate and as an employee of Achieving the Dream, my intention with this study was to report the unique ways transformational change can happen at community college based on geography, resources, leadership, and student body demographics. That I have significant access to information as an employee of Achieving the Dream, a national community college network organization, is important to account for. Community colleges are regional institutions which may choose to adopt some or all of frameworks offered by national organizations like Achieving the Dream, the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program, or the American Association of Community Colleges to its unique regional context. An important aspect of my data collection and analysis was focusing on how community colleges undertake transformational change to meet their regional and institutional needs, as opposed to inadvertently evaluating to what extent each research site has implemented the practices and reforms promoted by Achieving the Dream. I selected Kezar and Eckel's theory of transformational change to guide my study and analysis because the theory differs in important ways from how Achieving the Dream currently explains the change process, allowing me to question and counteract potential bias based on my current professional affiliation.

I approached this qualitative study of transformational change from the vantage and with the experiences described above. I chose Kezar and Eckel's theory of transformational change because its lens unifies my various professional experiences into one coherent narrative. From both within and without, I have seen what I perceive as the complex processes and cultural factors at work when transformational change is undertaken, of which senior leaders and campus members alike strive to make sense. My explicit intention was to fairly represent and depict the plurality of perspectives on transformational change I encountered through my research.

### **Limitations**

This dissertation study had limitations, an inherent component of any research conducted that should be clearly identified (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010). Four primary limitations -- nonrepresentative sampling, national support for change process, case within case limitations, and limited perspectives due to COVID -- are discussed here. First, purposeful nonprobability sampling identifies sites where transformative change is occurring, but this study was admittedly not fully representative. The site selection criteria allowed for variation between community colleges, but they did not ensure other important variables (e.g., a president's race/ethnicity or gender; different geographic categories of rural; and different balances between continuing education, transfer, and career/technical education program enrollment levels) were also fully represented and explored. Additional research is needed to achieve greater representation that accounts for a wider array of variables that impact community colleges' ability to enact transformational change processes.

The second limitation of this study was that my site selection was confined to community colleges that are members of Achieving the Dream's National Reform Network, to which I have access as an Achieving the Dream staff member. I offset the risks of convenience sampling --

low credibility and "information-poor" cases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 98) -- by applying Kezar and Eckel's (2002) criteria for transformative change and supplementing with further criterion-based selection (as described in "Site selection"). Nonetheless, colleges in Achieving the Dream's Network are at a distinct advantage since they have national resources and connections at their disposal. Further, their commitment to institutional improvement through the change process of capacity building is strengthened through involvement with Achieving the Dream and utilization of the Network's resources. Not all community colleges have access to these benefits, which impacts how they enact change processes and what support and resources they can utilize to achieve transformational change.

Third, two-tier sampling, the process of identifying "cases within cases" or whom the researcher will study at a particular case site (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), created limitations. Even after case sites were carefully selected to qualitatively explore phenomena, cases within those larger case sites -- individuals and units on campus -- became an important factor. Time and resource limitations constrained my ability to collect interview data from a fully representative set of campus members. I collected as much data as possible to maximize representation of various perspectives of the change process, but recognize the impossibility of capturing all voices and perspectives at a case site.

Finally, due to the pandemic this study includes fewer perspectives per college than I had initially planned. While the four participants per community college (the president or chancellor, along with three college leaders) offered invaluable insights into the transformational change process, the additional perceptions of faculty and staff I had initially hoped to capture through surveys, interviews, and focus groups were not feasible to collect due to the constraints imposed by the pandemic. Faculty and classified staff professionals have been extended to if not beyond

maximum capacity to help students during COVID-19, having to move most courses online and provide student supports in a remote setting in addition to trying to ensure students can even access WiFi. Granted, community college executives and leaders are also tremendously burdened, so asking them to still participate in this study placed a research burden on them. My genuine hope is that the findings I present from this study returns dividends to our field on the time these leaders generously gave to help the study move forward in challenging times.

Despite this study's limitations, it still offered important contributions to the literature base on transformational change as well as to community college practitioners. The analysis demonstrated how community colleges adapt national reform movements and essential institutional capacities within their unique regional context. Though my site selection was in part driven by colleges' affiliation with Achieving the Dream, these colleges were experiencing many of the same challenges other colleges not in Achieving the Dream's National Reform Network are also encountering. Those involved with the change process who participate in this study come from different areas of their colleges and still hold important viewpoints on the change process. This study is an important early step in transformational change literature focused on community colleges, and generates new areas for research based on my findings.

### **Conclusion**

This dissertation has advanced research on transformational change. Through the use rigorous qualitative research methods, it adds to the small subset of literature on transformational change in higher education that uses data to ascertain the extent to which change has occurred. The literature review informing this study formalizes Kezar and Eckel's theory of transformational change, and tests that theory in a new setting: the community college field. My purposeful nonprobability sampling and criterion-based selection methods for identifying

research sites enabled me to capture variation in how transformational change takes place since there are important differences between community colleges (president's tenure, college location, and enrollment and student diversity).

This dissertation makes multiple contributions to the community college field. This study has demonstrated how community colleges undertake transformational change in unique contexts with different organizational cultures and institutional resources. It also approached transformational change from a broad institutional perspective, focusing on whole-college change and capacity building as opposed to change amid implementation of a single initiative, tool, practice, or policy.

In terms of contributions to theory, this study also synthesized Kezar and Eckel's early theory of transformational change (developed nearly twenty years ago) with their more recent research, as well as that of other leading thinkers and researchers. What emerges is a nonlinear way of exploring transformational change while also accounting for the linear narratives community college presidents and their campus members form through studying sensemaking and organizational culture. This synthesized and expanded theory of transformational change concentrates on the influential structural and cultural factors at work amid the change process, and provides practitioners and researchers a clearer approach to undertaking transformational change at community colleges.

COVID-19 has intensified the need for transformational change to occur at community colleges. It has exacerbated long-standing inequities that negatively impact students historically underserved by higher education (Fain, 2020). Further, community colleges have recognized the need to strengthen the supports they offer to students both in the classroom (to ensure stronger learning outcomes, particularly in online courses) and out of the classroom (to provide wrap-

around services that connect students with the resources they need to persist) (Fain, 2020).

Literature to date indicates transformational change is needed to successfully and holistically implement stronger pedagogical practices and student services at community colleges. Yet higher education literature does not yet sufficiently indicate how community colleges can successfully undergo transformational change, particularly when it is experiencing unprecedented pressure to do so at an accelerated pace. This study will offer important insights into how community colleges can undergo transformational change to achieve stronger student outcomes, even amid crises and emergencies like COVID-19.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

This chapter presents findings from my multi-site case study of three community colleges that have undergone transformational change. I begin with a description of the colleges participating in this study. As part of this overview, I review descriptive data capturing student outcomes as signs of successful transformational change. I then present my analysis of each college as an independent case study, using 2019 Aspen Prize application data as well as perceptions I collected during interviews with executives (presidents or chancellors) and three college leaders at each case study site. In the next chapter (Chapter 5), I present answers to my research questions and synthesize my findings into key themes about transformational change at community colleges.

### **Overview of Participating Colleges and Their Student Outcomes**

As noted in Chapter 3 (Methods), the three community colleges participating in this dissertation study were all either finalists for or a winner of the 2019 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence: Indian River State College (Ft. Pierce, FL), Pierce College Fort Steilacoom Campus (Lakewood, WA), and Kingsborough Community College (Brooklyn, NY). They are all also located in metropolitan areas. All three are predominantly two-year public colleges, though Kingsborough has a four year classification based on its being a part of the City University of New York (CUNY). Indian River State College won the 2019 Aspen Prize (alongside another Florida community college, Miami Dade College). Pierce College was recognized as a Rising Star. Kingsborough Community College made the shortlist of the top ten finalists for the Aspen Prize. As the findings from this multi-site case study show in this chapter, these colleges have been undergoing transformational change for varying amounts of time, and they have undergone it using different strategies and with unique cultures.

All three community colleges participating in this study vary considerably. Table 1 presents geographic, demographic, and programmatic data on each community college, along with the length of the current president or chancellor's tenure.

**Table 1.** Comparison of Three Research Sites

Community College	Indian River State College	Pierce College (Ft. Steilacoom)	Kingsborough Community College
Bureau of Economic Analysis Region	Southeast	Far West	Mideast
CBSA Type (Metropolitan or Micropolitan)	Metropolitan	Metropolitan	Metropolitan
Total Enrollment	23,553	10,808	19,889
Carnegie Classification	Baccalaureate/Associate's Colleges: Mixed Baccalaureate/Associate's	Baccalaureate/Associate's Colleges: Associate's Dominant	Associate's Colleges: High Transfer-Mixed Traditional/Nontraditional
Current President/Chancellor	Dr. Timothy Moore (2020-)	Dr. Michelle Johnson (2005-)	Dr. Claudia Schrader (2018-)

*Note:* Bureau of Economic Analysis regions, CBSA types, and Carnegie classifications were obtained from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) for the 2018-2019 academic year. Total enrollment comes from IPEDS and represents the 2018-2019 academic year. percentage of full-time enrollment are derived from data included in community colleges' 2019 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence applications. Names of current executives and their year of installment were obtained from press releases issued by each respective college announcing its new executive.

As finalists or winners of the 2019 Aspen Prize, each community college participating in this study has demonstrated important longitudinal gains in student outcomes, including around reducing equity gaps and supporting historically underserved students. Data reported in Aspen 2019 Prize applications centered on outcomes for first-time in college (FITC) students in Fall 2012 (tracking period beginning 2015), 2013 (tracking period: 2016), and 2014 (tracking period: 2017). Colleges applying for the Aspen Prize reported on data around five key areas of student success: fall-to-fall persistence; three-year graduation and transfer rates; graduation rates (excluding transfers); persistence and early momentum; and gateway course success.

Each of the three colleges showed three graduation rates for FTIC students at rates significantly higher than the national average (*The 2019*, 2019). As each of the case studies observes (see below), equity gaps are pernicious and persist despite ongoing efforts to close them. Indian River, Pierce, and Kingsborough have been focused on completion and transfer outcomes at a time when many community colleges across the United States were (and oftentimes still are) struggling to advance from an access to a completion agenda (Wyner, 2014).

**Table 2.** Three Year Graduation Rate Changes (2012-2014 Cohorts)

Community College	Indian River State College	Pierce College (Ft. Steilacoom)	Kingsborough Community College
Percentage Increase in Three Year FTIC Graduation Rate Including Transfer (2012 Cohort)	36.9%	41.6%	34.7%
Percentage Increase in Three Year FTIC Graduation Rate Including Transfer (2014 Cohort)	40.8%	42.9%	38.2%

**Table 2** (continued).

Percentage Change between 2012 and 2014 Cohorts Including Transfer	3.9%	1.3%	3.5%
Percentage Increase in FTIC Three Year Graduation Rate Excluding Transfer (2012 Cohort)	25.7%	26.4%	23.3%
Percentage Increase in FTIC Three Year Graduation Rate Excluding Transfer (2014 Cohort)	31.3%	28.2%	25.3%
Percentage Change between 2012 and 2014 Cohorts Excluding Transfer	5.6%	1.8%	2%

*Note:* For Aspen’s College Excellence Program, FTIC entails students who enrolled for the first time in a postsecondary institution in the summer or fall of the cohort year listed in this table (2012, 2013, or 2014). These students enrolled in at least one credit course during their first semester at the respective community colleges featured in this table.

Awards and accolades like being a finalist for or winner of the Aspen Prize are desirable and have financial perks, but seeing more students be successful – especially historically minoritized and underserved students – is the core reason for undertaking transformational change. The interviews I conducted for this study happened nearly two years after the 2019 Aspen Prize was awarded, and all three participating community colleges indicated they are

working to continue improving their practices and policies so more students can be successful beyond those featured in their applications for the Prize.

In the pages that follow, I present data in aggregate, fusing original qualitative data collected through interviews with Aspen Prize packets. Non-executive participants in this study were promised anonymity when they committed to joining this study. Since only three non-executive participants per college participated, I have assigned pseudonyms for each non-executive college participant. To keep identities well protected, pseudonyms are comprised of an abbreviation for the college, the noun “Participant,” and a letter differentiating each participant (A, B, or C). So throughout the pages that follow, pseudonyms such as “IRSC Participant A,” “PC Participant B,” and “KCC Participant C” appear.

### **Indian River State College (FL)**

Indian River State College’s transformational change story spans over two decades. Initially a biology faculty member and then an administrator, Dr. Edwin Massey became President in 1988. President Massey had to spend his first decade as the chief executive “cleaning up” Indian River (to use his own phrase), at times using authoritarian means to accomplish what needed to be done, according to President Massey (with one additional Indian River participant indicating as necessary as well). Lawsuits, ethics commissions, audits revealing trouble: these problems took years to sort out in order for Indian River to be poised for transformational change, as community colleges need to be functional and viable before they can be excellent and exceptional. After twelve years of cleanup, Indian River found itself operating soundly but so restricted by corrective rules and regulations that it was functioning at a basic satisfactory level but “wasting potential” since it was not allowing its faculty, staff, and administrators to live up to their full potential.

To assess opportunities for helping the Indian River community reach its potential, President Massey arranged for an intensive 360 degree assessment that was internally designed and administered in 2002. The assessment, along with supplemental interviews and nine town halls, gathered employees' perspectives and assessed Indian River's readiness for change. President Massey was inspired to administer this assessment after meeting a Fortune 500 business consultant at an event in Florida and being encouraged to perform a landscape analysis of Indian River to understand how to shift to the next "improvement band," or phase of institutional growth and effectiveness. The 360 degree assessment revealed Indian River was maintaining the status quo, but it had settled into what President Massey described as an "unintentional culture of complacency" and needed to figure out how to "implement processes that work on the human side of it [institutional culture]."

President Massey adopted and provided crucial support for the adopted focus on student success from the executive office. The most prominent finding he took away from the 360 degree assessment was the need to invest in and develop a strong organizational culture at Indian River, one marked by innovation and creativity and geared toward student success. President Massey began demonstrating what he described as an unrelenting focus on student success and unwavering commitment to culture, which effectively fused the two (student success and culture). Early on, he addressed resistance and concerns from his executive cabinet, assuring them they would gain influential power and respect by sharing information and empowering their teams to mobilize on change efforts. Between the 360 degree assessment and the launch of five workgroups, President Massey established a new vision for Indian River (student success), installed structures to drive change (workgroups), and set the stage for Indian River's culture to evolve to align with its vision.

To drive forward the work President Massey commissioned, Indian River formed five workgroups, each devoted to one of five areas of focus: purpose; strong and viable organization; learning environment; future students; and communication. These five workgroups were all time-bound and charged with generating reports and action items aimed toward improvement around their respective topic. President Massey disbanded every committee (except those required for accreditation) when these five workgroups assembled. Each workgroup was comprised of administrators, faculty, and staff from across Indian River's campuses, all of whom were tasked with conducting research, working through differing and conflicting perspectives, and forming and presenting recommendations to the executive cabinet. President Massey's executive cabinet then vets and considers these recommendations. Administrators, faculty, and staff came to appreciate and support workgroups because they had a clear purpose, operated in transparent ways, and resulted in changes that were evidence-based and effectual.

What resulted from the initial five workgroups at Indian River was a synthesized value statement able to steer Indian River's efforts moving forward: "Student success comes first." This primary focus on student success provided a focal point for Indian River at large and everyone working there. Future workgroups formed afterward, even to the present day, harken to this same focus on student success, what IRSC Participant C called "our number one value, our number one priority." (Some of the most recent workgroups include IRSC 2030: Looking out to the Next Ten Years; Learning Environment; and Communication.) These workgroups arise in response to data and seek to improve campus culture, employee satisfaction, and student success. Soon thereafter, presentations regularly began with student success. As workgroups and the executive cabinet considered ideas for new or different policies and practices, the core question asked became "How will this help student success?" Increasingly, this question assumed an

equity lens, particularly after Indian River joined Achieving the Dream and began disaggregating equity gaps in student outcomes. Workgroups at Indian River have evolved since they began in the early 2000s, but they operate with a clear purpose and direct their efforts toward improving student success for their students.

While workgroups drove change at Indian River on the front lines, over the years President Massey routinely engaged Indian River's board of trustees so it would be aware and supportive of the student success work happening amid the transformational change process. During the board's monthly meetings, President Massey and his leadership team delivered regular presentations centered on student success and based on data. The information provided to the board positioned them to make informed budgetary decisions when President Massey shared opportunities for better helping students and where cuts could be made. President Massey regularly invited board members to college events and involved them whenever possible. As new board members joined Indian River, President Massey took personal responsibility for onboarding them through a series of one-on-one meetings providing an overview of the college and how it is working toward student success. As a result, the board was trained and prepared to support Indian River's work toward student success at the governance level.

#### *Transformational Programs and Use of Data at Indian River*

Workgroups and the data-centric culture at Indian River have led to important resources like the Employee Development Program and Institute for Academic Excellence. The Employee Development Program responded directly to the 360 degree assessment's finding that Indian River employees needed significant professional development opportunities to reach their innovative and creative potential. President Massey allocated resources to create a full-time position, housed within institutional effectiveness, to lead this program. The workgroup built

what became the Employee Development Program, and began by interviewing administrators, faculty, and staff about their professional development and training needs. Initial professional development offerings varied widely in response to the array of needs shared in interviews.

Over time and based on data, the Employee Development Program shifted to offering targeted training for key groups of employees that aligns with its purpose statement. The goals of the Employee Development Program (EDP) crystalized through establishing its purpose statement: “The purpose of EDP is to identify, develop and provide strategies, resources, tools and offerings designed to support and increase the effectiveness of Indian River State College Employees” (Employee, n.d.). IRSC Participant C described the purpose as “[c]onnecting resources to change lives.” By extension, EDP aims to connect opportunities with resources, meaning finding and allocating resources to promising ideas. Keeping the Employee Development Program within Indian River’s institutional effectiveness office allows it to align with and support the college’s planning and assessment, federal work, and data reporting.

The Employee Development Program at Indian River has grown to offer training throughout the year that equips employees for exemplary leadership and work. Department Chair Leadership Academy, discipline-specific leadership development, new faculty orientation, mentoring: these are but a few of the key training programs offered through the Employee Development Program. It also organizes and runs professional enhancement day for all Indian River employees, during which they participate in performance enhancement sessions, breakout group sessions, and plenum. Adjunct faculty are able to participate in development days on Saturdays, allowing them professional growth opportunities with less interference with their work schedules. The Employee Development Program also regularly engages third party expertise to deliver content during development sessions. Indian River’s Employee Development

Program remains vibrant today, as it is responsive to evidence and data demonstrating areas where the college and its administrators, faculty, and staff can improve their practice and thereby improve student success.

Workgroups also form in response to trends noticed in Indian River's data, such as one that examined the steady increase in online course enrollment, which resulted in what was known initially as Indian River's Virtual Campus and broadened into its Global Campus. In the 2010 academic year, Indian River noticed the percentage of its students taking online courses reach double digit figures. For nearly ten years, Indian River had allowed faculty to teach some of their courses online without careful planning and instructional design in place to maximize student learning. After presenting data on changing enrollment patterns to President Massey, a time-limited workgroup formed to research best practices in online education and how to brand distance learning for the Indian River community.

The online education workgroup's findings steered the shaping and development of Indian River's Virtual Campus. Early on they found that 90% of students who enrolled in distance education courses were in Indian River's service district, meaning Indian River was geographically accessible but for various reasons students considered online courses preferable or optimal over on-campus ones. The college also developed four fully online programs during the workgroup's first year operating as a group. Indian River also hired a cadre of instructional designers to guide faculty in developing their online courses and programs to ensure student learning and strong course outcomes. Faculty were wary of instructional designers at first, as they initially conceived of instructional designers as professionals who built online courses as faculty directed them to. The workgroup sparked a cultural change whereby faculty came to see instructional designers as experts in digital pedagogy who helped faculty adopt better teaching

practices that strengthened student learning and outcomes in distance learning courses. Online courses became stronger as faculty began to embrace the support instructional designers offered them.

The Virtual Campus grew and eventually was rebranded as the Global Campus. Faculty have access to learning management system (LMS) and classroom technology training, as well as Indian River's Virtual Campus Instructor Training course. The college expanded the number of fully online programs from four to fifteen, all of which were strengthened through Indian River's implementation of guided pathways. To ensure high quality of courses, Indian River joined Quality Matters, a program within MarylandOnline, Inc., that certifies "the quality of online and blended college courses across institutions" (About, n.d.). Now, 70% of Indian River students take at least one course online, and before COVID-19, 33% of students were completing all of their courses online. Indian River's quick recognition of and response to the shift toward online courses allowed it to implement the infrastructure and training needed for effective online learning.

Indian River is driven by data even when workgroups do not spearhead targeted improvement efforts. Indian River prioritized strengthening its use of data between 2006 and 2008, when it wanted to better understand roadblocks inversely impacting enrollment and completion in various areas at the college. It initially relied on its institutional effectiveness office to lead data disaggregation efforts, revealing equity gaps in student outcomes. Drawing from service engineer thinking, it fused the examination of institutional processes and wraparound services with institutional data. The next major phase of Indian River's use of data coincided with joining Achieving the Dream and working with a data coach. Through these coaching sessions, Indian River fused equity with data and began asking how it was working to

ensure its students – *all* of its students – had the same chances at enrolling in any program at Indian River that would lead to a good job with family-sustaining wages after graduating. A data expert sits on every workgroup and deepens the group’s thinking and strategizing through the use of data examined with an emphasis on equity.

In one case, Indian River performed a targeted study to understand equity gaps in enrollment and completion with its nuclear technician program, a program that directly leads to employment with local companies like Florida Power & Light. These companies wanted to diversify their workforce and turned to Indian River for help, given the education-to-career pipeline it had established with the College. Indian River disaggregated its program data and realized the college algebra requirement disproportionately impacted underserved students of color, who frequently lacked the course. Indian River created a parallel program pathway for fifteen students, who completed college algebra while beginning coursework in the nuclear technician program. With supports in place, all fifteen students successfully completed college algebra and graduated from the nuclear technician program.

A key strategy Indian River has adopted is securing national funding for innovative efforts with no fiscal penalty for not meeting set metrics for success. Such grants allow Indian River to function as an incubation chamber for innovative ideas aimed at student success. More recently, Indian River was awarded one million dollars from the National Science Foundation to support first-time presidents at other colleges with securing funding for innovative work from the National Science Foundation. In short, Indian River is showing other colleges how to align their strategic mission with its current economic development plan, then find funding that matches these two driving forces. Indian River pursued this grant with an understanding that declining enrollment will only shrink college budgets and exacerbate college leaders’ tendency to be risk-

averse when in reality they need to be entrepreneurial to secure new sources of revenue. Indian River's rich use of data and entrepreneurial approach have allowed it to create great economic opportunities for its students and its local economy.

### *Culture at Indian River*

Culture is highly valued at Indian River, so much so that, as President Massey reflected, it accounts for the wonder visitors experience when they visit the college: "There's something about this place. We can't put our finger on it, but ... [it is] good." Indian River began its work on culture back around 2000 with a focus on helping employees reach their potential and thereby enhance the college's human capital. Once workgroups emerged, culture expanded to embrace a singular focus on student success, which was adopted as a goal for employees to apply their innovation and creativity toward. As the college's use of data and understanding of equity deepened, Indian River's culture sharpened its grasp of problems impacting students and measure of how well interventions helped students.

Early on in its transformational change process, Indian River responded to the results of its 360 degree assessment by recognizing the need to develop employee potential and strengthen human capital. Indian River committed to what President Massey described as "figuring out how to get people around you to work great, reduce risk factors for taking chances, and applauding small failures." This change had to begin with the president, as the executive has the responsibility of triggering and supporting work around transformational change and cultural evolution. From there executive cabinet members, deans, mid-level managers, faculty and classified staff professionals felt empowered to begin taking action and reaching their professional potential.

Around 2006, a mantra formed and became *the* guiding principle: “Student success is the most important thing at Indian River State College.” Indian River’s change management consultant stressed the value of branding student success to align with Indian River as an institution. In response to this, Indian River created “the River Way,” a name for the cultural mindset at the college that puts students first and establishes clear expectations for all Indian River employees, synthesized here: be proactive and helpful when engaging with students; operate and refine based on data; and perform your work with respect for every individual and honor for the college. Because of the deep cultural work that had been happening, the River Way became what IRSC Participant 3 characterized as a “way of life, a way of operating” at Indian River. The River Way was updated in 2019, to retain its core tenets but integrate lean concepts after Indian River completed a Six Sigma analysis.

Throughout the transformational change process, Indian River has relied on data to identify areas for better serving its students and skills employees need to provide those supports. Careful disaggregation of the data to “understand what’s happening on the ground,” as IRSC Participant A stated, and identify equity gaps initially left Indian River “stunned by the discrepancies” but incited the college to take action, as IRSC Participant B recalled. Indian River uses various data to pinpoint areas employees need professional development to gain skills and strengthen programs intended to close equity gaps. Indian River’s culture is now known for being both data-literate and data-fluid, particularly in its use of metadata that creates multifaceted views of students and their needs. As IRSC Participant C noted in response to a question about Indian River’s use of data, the college recognizes the interconnection between data and students: “Every data point is a student’s life.” Knowing students’ well-being and futures depends in part

on their learning experience at the college drives Indian River to relentlessly pursue continuous improvement.

*Looking Ahead for Indian River*

Indian River has accomplished much for its students and its employees through the transformational change process, but according to study participants it also perceives the need – and feels the desire – to continue evolving and improving in the coming years. Some participants felt Indian River’s culture was vibrant and thriving, though IRSC Participant A felt this was due in part to an “[old] guard” having left the college. A new president, Dr. Timothy Moore, was installed at Indian River in September 2020, and he inherited an institution with strong capacity and infrastructure in place. President Moore is harnessing and expanding relationships, both in Indian River’s four county service area and nationally, and capitalizing on opportunities the college is “positioned to jump on,” as IRSC Participant A observed.

As Indian River moves forward under the leadership of its new president, it continues to stay singularly focused on student success and seek ways to deepen its commitment to equity and further refine its student services. Indian River is working to streamline onboarding experiences for students like assessment and advising, drawing from retail examples of exceptional customer service (e.g., Disney World) to make navigating higher education intuitive and simple for students, whose tolerance for complicated bureaucratic processes has steadily diminished in recent years. One executive cabinet member has even taken it upon herself to unofficially update the River Way to a third version that codifies the urgency of proactively meeting all students’ needs, with the lofty goal of no complaints. While admittedly unrealistic according to one participant, the pursuit of receiving no complaints speaks to a relentless pursuit of providing exceptional support and service to students.

Indian River's commitment to student success will have to adapt and automate technologically. Participants reflected on the implications of higher education having entered "the age of Amazon" and started adopting artificial intelligence. Already leading employers like Amazon and Salesforce care more about what applicants know than where they obtained their education. Higher education institutions like Indian River will have to determine how to stay competitive with its offerings in an increasingly globalized world. IRSC Participant A argued that because of its entrepreneurial success, Indian River needs to advocate for accreditation to shift from a "brick and mortar" model to one that confers value on colleges and universities that are responsive to employer needs and deliver strong labor market outcomes to its students completing credentials and degrees. IRSC Participant B noted Indian River is already deploying chatbots and predictive analytics, but it needs to continue figuring out how to integrate artificial intelligence into the classroom to strengthen pedagogy and learning outcomes. Indian River sees a technologically sophisticated future for itself and its students, but it plans to use and expand the capacity it has built through transformational change to successfully adapt to this future and meet the needs of all its students.

#### **Pierce College: Ft. Steilacoom (WA)**

Whereas Indian River took on transformational change with an initial focus on culture that quickly adopted student success, Pierce College (Ft. Steilacoom, WA) began its transformational change journey by first looking at data showing its low student completion rates and deciding to recalibrate its mission as an institution to explicitly focus on student success. During an Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) convening in 2010, Pierce looked at its longitudinal data around completion (as opposed to enrollment, which it had been focusing on before) and, and Chancellor Johnson remembered, was "shocked" and "rattled to the

core” by what it found. “How was this even possible?” Chancellor Michele Johnson recalled asking herself. Pierce was already laying the groundwork for transformational change starting in 2006, when it was completing reaccreditation and decided to organize its report based on outcomes, not standards. But seeing longitudinal outcomes compelled Pierce to codify its commitment to student success in a revised mission statement for the college: “Pierce College creates quality educational opportunities for a diverse community of learners to thrive in an evolving world.”

Pierce opted to join Achieving the Dream (ATD) when it acknowledged it needed external help taking the steps needed to equitably engage its diverse students with strong learning experiences that prepare them for economic opportunities. Chancellor Johnson decided to lead Pierce’s student success work through ATD, with Dr. Thomas Broxson (then District Dean of Natural Science) serving as the team lead for Pierce’s data work. Early on, Pierce implemented reforms in key areas other colleges were working on: mandatory orientation, advising, developmental education reform, and college success courses. Participants recalled that faculty initially resisted the student success efforts Pierce began after joining ATD, which led to Pierce systematically working to engage faculty based on institutional data on student outcomes. Pierce disaggregated its data and mapped the student experience from start to finish, giving them a comprehensive view of the loss points and equity gaps leading to only eighteen percent of their students graduating. Pierce used ATD’s Institutional Capacity Framework to lay the groundwork for becoming a data-driven college, using metrics to continuously measure the extent to which its actions and interventions coincided with its mission of fostering student success for its diverse students.

After refocusing its mission on student success, Pierce aligned its institutional effectiveness and professional development to both operate in service of student success. After sharing student outcomes data with faculty (the same data that dislodged Chancellor Johnson and her executive cabinet), Pierce developed a scorecard and formed an institutional effectiveness committee tasked with ensuring Pierce's institutional effectiveness aligned with and supported Pierce's revamped mission. The institutional effectiveness committee reviews Pierce's scorecard every other year and evaluates the soundness of its measures. As a group, it reflects on new student success programs Pierce should consider creating or adopting to help its students.

Similar to institutional effectiveness, professional development ensures employee learning and professional development connect to Pierce's needs and mission, and can be assessed with the support of institutional effectiveness. Professional development is overseen by the Director of Employee Engagement, Learning, and Development, who sits on numerous committees (executive team, institutional effectiveness, dean's table, among others) and keeps a pulse on current and emerging learning opportunities and professional development needs. Professional development extends to culture and climate, helping employees move beyond a baseline of cultural competencies to cultural engagement, humility, and vulnerability, all of which are critical to counteracting white fragility and Pierce becoming an anti-racist institution, a goal Pierce College adopted after trying to close equity gaps for years and in response to the social justice movements in the summer months of 2020.

Pierce has regularly engaged its board of trustees in the transformational change process. Consisting of five trustees, Pierce's board has been invested in Pierce's transformation and become staunch advocates for equity at Pierce. It has formed a close relationship with Chancellor Johnson and struck an important balance: being able to carefully listen to the chancellor without

extending beyond governance into management and operations. Asked about Pierce's trustees, PC Participant B observed, "[Pierce's] board is truly invested. They have a real interest in students. They want to know the truth—the good, the bad. . . . When they were presented with graduation rates with disaggregated data, they said, 'Nope, that isn't good enough.'" Board members shared a sense of urgency around transforming Pierce to improve student success, and are fully supportive of its recent efforts to become an anti-racist institution. Board members undergo study sessions that cover Pierce's mission and focus on student success, as well as how it uses data to identify equity gaps and plan professional development and interventions meant to close those gaps. Pierce's board draws on this training when it reviews tenure packets and, more recently, as it begins succession planning with Chancellor Johnson as it plans next steps for Pierce to fulfill its mission.

#### *Transformational Programs and Use of Data at Pierce College*

Since undertaking the transformational change process, Pierce has adopted over forty interventions and initiatives aimed at increasing student success. Chancellor Johnson recalled that Pierce's ATD coaches asked, "Are you [all] crazy? You're not going to be able to do this." But as Chancellor Johnson also recollected, Pierce's culture is not content with low success rates for their students, which created openness to adopting a constellation of interventions collectively oriented toward helping more students be successful. Among these, three of the most impactful to Pierce's transformation have been the creation of data dashboards (and through this the democratization of data across Pierce), professional development through action-based research for faculty through Title III funding, and the adoption of guided pathways.

Pierce demonstrated its commitment to data by implementing data dashboards across the district's three campuses. As it explored its disparities in student outcomes and equity gaps, it

soon found disparities in student outcomes at the faculty and course levels. Student success rates ranged as far as 25 percent to 95 percent in the same disciplines and courses. As faculty began conversing about why the data were so stark, they realized they had “wildly different interpretations” of course outcomes and were assessing students differently, as PC Participant C observed when asked about Pierce’s use of data. To facilitate continued conversations, Pierce opted to create data dashboards making course-level data available to all Pierce faculty. Pierce’s institutional effectiveness office has taken similar steps, placing scorecards measuring institutional outcomes into dashboards. The institutional office held meetings across campus to better understand what role every office or department played in key elements of student success: enrollment, retention and persistence, and completion. As PC Participant A shared in response to a question about data use, “There is a unique role that each office, each department does that no one else does that impacts students around these important parts of the student experience.” Pierce’s data dashboards make clear where there are opportunities for improving student outcomes, and these dashboards ground conversations among Pierce college members about how to potentially move forward. Many of Pierce’s dashboards are only accessible internally, but they have published and made publicly available some of their dashboards like one on enrollment for 2019-2020 (“2019-2020”).

As it has implemented data dashboards, Pierce has been careful to use them in a constructive way and not make people afraid they will be punished. Chancellor Johnson recalled a presentation Pierce gave at a national data summit conference, where a Pierce faculty member (attending but not presenting) shared faculty were unsure what to make of the dashboards at first but came to realize there’s no punishment. Instead, they were created so faculty could be “learning from each other.” Pierce’s culture is one that expects excellence because its mission is

bold in its embrace of student success. Given this expectation, PC Participant A observed that data dashboards are used so “people can see their place in making every data point happen. Everyone develops outcomes by department – for example, security, admissions – that they’re working toward and measuring.” Dashboards make people at Pierce visible: Pierce college members see their own efforts at work, and they see how their efforts are impacting students at Pierce as a result.

Seeing data alone does not *de facto* create stronger student outcomes, so Pierce has been purposeful about providing professional development to help college members improve in their practice. A Title III grant Pierce won in 2013 enabled it to create the Center for Engagement and Learning (CEAL), which provides targeted skills training and professional development to faculty based on institutional and course-level data. Initially, faculty were resistant because they felt they had not had granted permission to undertake this work. As the program’s benefits to faculty’s pedagogy, salary, and progress toward tenure became apparent, faculty warmed to the opportunity. In partnership with a team focused on institutional outcomes, CEAL helps full-time and part-time faculty alike grasp the core abilities required of students and provides tailored professional development to help faculty infuse these core abilities into their courses. As Pierce has increased its focus on equity, CEAL also offers faculty an equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) curriculum to help faculty adopt inclusive pedagogical strategies and increase their equity-mindedness.

As faculty have grown in their data literacy and undergone professional development to increase student outcomes, Pierce has also implemented guided pathways as part of the first cohort doing so in connection with the American Association of Community Colleges and other third-party supporters. It moved slowly with implementing guided pathways, as anywhere from

100 to 200 Pierce college members elected to participate in planning for pathways, and hearing and synthesizing everyone's feedback was slow-going work. The planning efforts around guided pathways resulted in six meta-majors that bundled courses together that led to students progressing toward a credential or degree in a more timely manner. Pathways were effective at Pierce because they were comprised of redesigned courses that had been refined by faculty who had undergone professional development and aligned their course outcomes with key competencies and abilities needed not only in that course but in subsequent courses. Pierce rebranded its guided pathways as career pathways, as the latter term makes more sense to students since it speaks to their goal of employment after graduation.

### *Culture at Pierce College*

Since it began its transformational change, Pierce has re-centered its culture around its mission and focused it on data literacy, equity, innovation, and representation. Mission is at the forefront of Pierce employees' thinking. (To reiterate, Pierce's revised mission statement reads as follows: "Pierce College creates quality educational opportunities for a diverse community of learners to thrive in an evolving world.") The data Pierce analyzes and the results of assessments it completes are used to better grasp the changes happening in the world, the current and upcoming educational needs of its students and community, and the supports students need in and out of the classroom to be successful – all keep components of Pierce's mission statement. In response to a question about Pierce's focus on student success, PC Participant A remarked, "Our mission focuses us on student success. Every meeting, every action, every conversation is rooted in what's the best thing for students." During her interview, Chancellor Johnson recalled when Pierce received ATD's Leah Meyer Austin Award in 2017, she was invited to the stage and in turn invited with her the entire Pierce team at DREAM, the ATD conference where the Award is

conferred each year. During her remarks she began quoting Pierce's mission statement, turned around when she heard something and realized it was her team quoting the mission with her, turned back to face the audience and in unison with her team proclaimed Pierce's mission to an audience of around 2,000 attendees. In keeping with that experience, each participant from Pierce quoted the college's mission statement verbatim at some point during our interviews, demonstrating how inculcated Pierce's mission statement has become to its student success efforts for college members.

Pierce's use of data guides its pursuit to fulfill its mission. It has increased data literacy across the district's three campuses through training and professional development. Seeing and coming to understand Pierce's disaggregated data and the equity gaps it revealed alongside low completion rates created great urgency around improving student success. As PC Participant A recalled, "Once you see you can't unsee. You can't go back. Once you see that data and you think, 'Well, 75 percent of students are doing well' but then disaggregate. And then you say, 'Oh no, that's not okay.'" Pierce goes beyond data disaggregation by collecting data to assess and evaluate how well interventions like faculty action research projects contribute to more students being successful. Pierce college members are supportive of interventions with data showing gains in student success, though there are cases like shifting to a corequisite model (wherein developmental courses are taught in tandem with curriculum courses) takes years of consistently showing data before some college members are convinced that the intervention does indeed yield strong student outcomes. Pierce's data-focused culture has flipped its script, where Pierce takes responsibility for students not succeeding rather than assigning responsibility to the students themselves.

Pierce's data literacy has led to its culture being deeply committed to equity and demonstrating equity-mindedness, which is culminating in its recent shift to becoming an anti-racist institution. Pierce has been pleased to see its student outcomes improve for all student groups since it began its transformational change process, but it is dissatisfied that equity gaps have persisted as student outcomes have risen across the board. Pierce set a goal of closing all equity gaps at its campuses by 2020 as it began its work with ATD (a goal which it did not meet, which has sparked reflection and discussion across the district), and it doubled down on its efforts when it found around 2016 and 2017 that equity gaps were persisting despite overall rises in student success. So far, the culture has deepened its commitment to equity at crucial junctures for Pierce: changing its budgeting process, deepening its use of data, and adopting systems meant to counteract inequities. Pierce recently hired an executive director of equity, diversity and inclusion, and this individual is pushing Pierce's thinking forward in critical ways. Pierce recognizes its equity-minded culture will no doubt alter and grow as it adapts and responds to Pierce having become an anti-racist institution. Pierce's cultural commitment to its mission necessitates taking on equity, as Chancellor Johnson noted in her interview.

As Pierce's culture continues its efforts to fulfill its mission using data and equity-mindedness, it will also draw from its innovation and budgeting process that allows for cross-campus representation for determining how to allocate resources toward mission fulfillment. Pierce college members are constantly exhibiting innovation by drawing from national best practices and designing interventions that respond directly to struggles their students are experiencing. Pierce's budgeting process (a cultural centerpiece because it involves all groups across the district to actively participate) encourages innovation by hearing budget presentations from departments across campus, which share innovative ideas and practices with data showing

strong preliminary student outcomes that they would like to scale at Pierce. This budgeting process entails departments also identifying areas where they can absorb a 1-2 percent budget cut, likely by decreasing funding in certain areas or discontinuing underperforming efforts and initiatives. The cross-representative budgeting team (which includes union leader) then votes on which innovative interventions to recommend for funding to Pierce's board of trustees. This budgeting process, rooted in Pierce's cultural commitment to taking innovative approaches to equitable student success based on data, has led to between seven and eight million dollars being reallocated to allow innovative efforts to move forward.

### *Looking Ahead for Pierce College*

At the forefront of Pierce's mind is how becoming an anti-racist institution will clarify its focus on equity and continue transforming its culture as it seeks to close its equity gaps. Reflecting on equity, PC Participant A asked, "How is equity-mindedness integrated through everything? How do we interrogate everything?" Pierce knows itself to be a college that fully commits when it makes a commitment, particularly since they ensure every possible effort coincides with its mission before fully committing. Pierce also grasps the weight and significance of becoming an anti-racist institution as it continues to reflect on persistent equity gaps, as PC Participant B noted in response to a question about equity: "This is going to change everything. It just is. It's gonna be uncomfortable, messy, tough. We need to address white supremacy culture, need to let go of perfection, of 'more is better.' This is going to ground us in the student experience in a new way. We say we're a community of learners. This will be a reality check: the human side of this." Responding to the same question, PC Participant A said Pierce still is unsure of what it really means to be an anti-racist institution but knows the change will be pervasive to be authentic: "If we don't transform the whole way we welcome and engage

and empower students and our community, we're not going to be there [a truly anti-racist institution] until we do all this. We'll continue to hone. We won't stop that. It's too embedded in our culture now.”

For Pierce, concomitant with the work of becoming an anti-racist institution and continued efforts to close its equity gaps is wrestling with white fragility. Pierce has long championed equity. But as it has intensified its commitment to equity and social justice through becoming an anti-racist institution, participants shared that white fragility is emerging as this campus transformation is occurring and forcing people to be vulnerable amid the change process (Cabrera, Franklin, & Watson, 2017; DiAngelo, 2018). College members recognize that becoming an anti-racist institution aligns with Pierce's mission and is the natural progression for its equity and social justice work to take. Yet as Chancellor Johnson noted, “Some people are [asking], ‘What about me?’” Pierce is committed to insisting that Black lives matter, as do the lives of people of races, genders, and groups that have been historically oppressed or repressed; at the same time, Pierce's culture is supportive of college members struggling to gain the skills cultural competencies needed to contribute to Pierce's work. As PC Participant A observed, “We're all on that white fragility scale. The question is where are we? Helping them [those struggling with white fragility] is helping our students. ... Nobody's exempt from this work.” Equity casts a moral, all-encompassing vision, but people coming from historical and contemporary privilege need to decipher how to humbly and actively participate in a transforming world yielding transformative opportunities for billions of people who have been historically excluded from opportunity.

One area where Pierce is poised to embody what it means to address white fragility as an anti-racist college is faculty pedagogy. Recently an inclusive pedagogy priority group formed,

with a math faculty member leading it and roughly twenty faculty members participating in the group. This group, as PC Participant C recalled about a question about Pierce's future, is working to "rally do a deep dive critically examining your [faculty's] own practice, thinking about what you're doing in terms of inclusivity." The group's goal is to scale across Pierce's entire district, creating peer networks across the three district campuses where faculty can visit one another's classrooms, offer candid observations about not only the faculty member's use of culturally inclusive pedagogical practices but also the atmosphere of the class. Continuing to reflect on future work for Pierce faculty, PC Participant C observed that there is a "huge potential to make the classroom [at Pierce] a lot more inclusive and effective, especially for students who have been marginalized." This group's work carries great promise because it responds to the disaggregated data analysis Pierce has completed, connects faculty participating in this effort with professional development opportunities based on their peers' observations regarding areas for improvement, and embodies the spirit of being an anti-racist institution by focusing on how welcome students feel in the classroom and how optimal the course structure and pedagogy are to making them feel included, represented, and understood.

As faculty continue to improve professionally, Pierce sees a need to provide similar training and professional development opportunities for classified staff professionals. The Title III grant Pierce received in 2013 positioned Pierce to help its faculty make the tremendous pedagogical gains and achieve greater learning outcomes for students (described earlier), but how to provide similarly transformative development opportunities for classified staff professionals remains elusive and challenging. Whereas faculty's more flexible schedules make professional development opportunities more accessible, the round-the-clock nature of schedules for classified staff professionals poses significant obstacles to scheduling synchronous

development sessions for them. As PC Participant B observed when thinking about professional development, “Their workload is so high. Things keep getting in the way for them [classified staff professionals].” Communities of practice have emerged among classified staff professionals (as among faculty), but even these informal and ad hoc groups struggle to find time to meet. Finding ways to deliver professional development to classified staff professionals – synchronous and asynchronous, on site and with external groups – will be critical to creating valuable training that helps more Pierce employees more thoroughly fulfill the college’s mission.

Pierce remains committed to continuous improvement and professional development for faculty and staff alike, but the pandemic has compelled Pierce to consider self-care alongside its drive to constantly become and do better for its students. In 2020 and while adapting to the pandemic, Pierce moved forward with implementing new systems and officially becoming an anti-racist college. Both Chancellor Johnson and at least one participant recognized burnout across Pierce’s district, including the Ft. Steilacoom campus. During a recent All District Day, Chancellor Johnson called for Pierce to lead with bravery and purpose but also with care. PC Participant B indicated that Pierce employees need reflective periods to reorient: “You just need to take a day here and there to ask, ‘Where are we?’ You need to be able to take a breath.” To help with self-care, Pierce implemented a policy allowing for employees to be a part of an affinity group and meet regularly. Affinity groups range from LGBTQ to white fragility, but they allow for community to grow and employees to bond over shared challenges they experience amid Pierce’s ongoing growth.

### **Kingsborough Community College (NY)**

Of the three community colleges participating in this study, Kingsborough Community College is unique in that it has been successful in beginning transformational change, though the

process has been interrupted by changes in leadership, external pressures from unions and working within the City University of New York (CUNY) system, discrimination lawsuits, and rapidly declining enrollment exacerbated by the pandemic. Senior leaders participating in this study all conveyed pride in what Kingsborough has accomplished in a highly diverse area (Brooklyn, New York), as a part of CUNY. But as one participant observed, Kingsborough faces what KCC Participant A described as “existential threats” that have paused the progress it made with transformational change and are forcing it to address crucial issues like stabilizing enrollment before continuing with its transformational change.

Within CUNY, Kingsborough has consistently been the highest performing community college with stronger student outcomes than sister two-year public institutions in CUNY (though its sister two year institutions are gaining ground in student outcomes, thanks in part to successful programs that have been scaled from Kingsborough to these peer institutions). Through its transformational change process, Kingsborough has implemented innovative programs and interventions for its students with transformational potential, including learning communities (later known as ASAP), Single Stop USA, and (most recently) the Kingsborough Welcome Wagon. While not clearly coordinated, these programs have generated increased student outcomes. Study participants from Kingsborough all expressed an abiding institutional commitment to student success and evidence of transformational change having occurred and continuing to occur, but during interviews these components were not conveyed in a coherent organizational narrative drive by mission or strategy. The challenges Kingsborough has faced and continues to confront have complicated its ability to unify these various interventions into a coherent institutional movement toward student success.

Multiple presidents at Kingsborough have worked to steer the transformational change process in the midst of significant challenges. Transformational change began during President Byron McClenney's tenure (2000-2003), as he saw the potential in implementing learning communities to transform the student experience, beginning in the classroom and extending beyond. Transformational change took root during the tenure of President Regina Peruggi (2004-2013), who accelerated the impact of learning communities by working to break down silos across Kingsborough, shifting the college's management culture away from micromanagement, and made way for innovation and creativity. President Farley Herzek (2015-2018) began to expand the college's focus to consider students holistically and devote resources to meet their out-of-class needs and help them enroll, persist, and complete their credentials and degrees, though his shorter time in office did not allow for these changes to fully materialize. Non-executive participants indicated the transformational change gained the most momentum during President Peruggi's decade-long tenure, but challenges and pressures mounted after her departure and created challenges for transformational change process.

Since becoming President in 2018, Dr. Claudia Schrader has worked to begin threading together Kingsborough's efforts with stronger organizations processes, greater reliance on data to measure interventions aimed at supporting more students, and increased communication. Kingsborough senior leaders, including President Schrader, are identifying places where barriers to student success are present, and working to remove those barriers so students can progress. One example of this is waiving balances of less than fifty dollars that were preventing students from enrolling for the Spring 2021 semester. Kingsborough has effectively collected data for a long time. But since President Schrader assumed the executive office and the pandemic set in, Kingsborough has strengthened its use of data in the decisions it has to make. Kingsborough has

also increased the volume and quality of communication going out, with President Schrader and each vice president at Kingsborough writing and sending monthly reports that include data illustrating problems and the impact of interventions deployed. In the past employees complained that not enough communication was occurring at Kingsborough, but now they struggle to keep up with and digest the information and data being communicated.

Kingsborough's transformational change began during President McClenney's tenure with conceiving of and implementing learning communities in a way that fundamentally changed the college's focus to student success along with how Kingsborough operated. Like other interventions like guided pathways or developmental education reform, learning communities could have been implemented in a standalone, isolated way (Brock, Mayer, & Rutschow, 2016; Mokher et al, 2020). But learning communities, along with how leadership supported this program, allowed for greater collaboration and partnerships between faculty and staff. The transformational change process continued as more programs like Single Stop USA expanded Kingsborough's focus on student success to what happens to and with them outside the classroom in addition to within it, thus adopting a holistic commitment to students' well-being. Kingsborough's increased use of data has helped enable its administrators, faculty, and staff to gauge the impact of their work and shift strategies and tactics as needed. The primary and secondary data collected for this study did not indicate a thorough and comprehensive integration of these interventions into a coherent reform agenda driving the student success work at Kingsborough, though these interventions show great potential for being integrated with one another.

*Transformational Programs and Use of Data at Kingsborough*

For over a decade, Kingsborough has been recognized as an innovative community college, a “hidden jewel” (to use KCC Participant B’s description) that gained national attention and visibility through the Aspen Prize and other national platforms. Students who were not successful at other CUNY colleges and universities oftentimes choose to start again at Kingsborough, despite its relative geographic isolation and the long commute to and from campus many students have to complete on public transit (upwards of ninety minutes each way for some students). Programs such as learning communities and Single Stop USA connect students with one another, faculty and staff on campus, and college and community resources, which collectively position students to be successful at Kingsborough. An important component of resuming the transformational change process will be integrating these interventions so they fuse supports for students and track college-wide outreach to each student.

Kingsborough is well known for its Learning Communities, its “signature pedagogy” that began two decades ago with a goal of helping students strengthen their college readiness and persist through their first year at Kingsborough. The data I collected for this study suggest Kingsborough’s transformational change began with implementing Learning Communities. This intervention supported students by enrolling them in a Student Development course with an instructor who also serves as those students’ advisor for the first year. By design, students taking the Student Development course saw their advisors (who doubled as their instructors) throughout the semester. Besides sharing college success strategies to new students, this program also created opportunities for check-ins and timely interventions when challenges arose, such as absences or trouble in other courses or outside of class. The Learning Communities program evolved to keep students connected with their instructor and advisor for two years, as opposed to

an advisor reassignment happening after the student's first semester. The Learning Communities model allowed for students to form relationships with peer students in their Student Development course and also a long-term connection with a faculty member who also serves as their advisor for much of their time at Kingsborough.

Learning Communities experienced resistance from some faculty, but its broad success alleviated concerns about the program's effectiveness have been alleviated by strong student outcomes. As first-time students were registered for a full-time load of courses alongside Student Development, many were registered for curriculum-level courses like psychology or sociology if they also placed into developmental math, developmental English courses, and/or English as a Second Language immersion courses. Early on, faculty expressed a common concern: students cannot be successful academically in curriculum level courses if they need courses that strengthen their college readiness. Longitudinal data, however, showed Learning Communities led to strong course completion rates, particularly for African-American and Hispanic students able to get into the program, who have been adversely impacted by equity gaps at Kingsborough. Faculty became increasingly supportive as they taught the Student Development course, built strong relationships with their students and advisees, and saw institutional data showing strong student outcomes.

CUNY saw the positive impact Learning Communities were having on student success at Kingsborough, and the system elected to scale the intervention to Kingsborough's peer two year and four year peers in the system. The program model stayed largely the same, but intrusive advising became an increased focus and the name changed to Accelerated Studies in Associate Degree Program (ASAP). Kingsborough conducted focus groups with alumnae of the ASAP program, who shared that they found their time with their advisor, free textbooks, and free mass

transit cards critical to helping them be successful. Having the same advisor and case manager throughout a students' entire course of study at Kingsborough helps them build a strong relationship while receiving guidance every semester. Reflecting on ASAP, KCC Participant A worried that the absorption of Learning Communities by CUNY and repackaging of it as ASAP has "watered down" its impact, but data continue to show strong student outcomes. The high cost of running ASAP also raises uncertainty regarding its scalability to all students.

As Learning Communities developed, improved, and evolved into ASAP, a series of other programs have emerged that support the student success efforts Learning Communities launched: Strategic Partnerships for Achievement and Retention at Kingsborough (SPARK), Accelerated College ESL (ACE-ESL), and My Brother's Keeper. These programs seek to build community and a sense of belonging among students while increasing their momentum through their coursework. ASAP, SPARK, and ACE-ESL support students with maintaining momentum by matching them to an advisor in their major (ASAP), lower and remove barriers to success for historically underserved students (SPARK), and enroll in curriculum courses while completing an ESL course (ACE-ESL). My Brother's Keeper provides mentoring to African-American males, a historically underserved group that benefits from building community and academic support. The data collected for this study did not demonstrate clear interconnections between these programs to jointly work toward increased student success beyond creating opportunities for different offices at Kingsborough to collaborate.

Kingsborough was the first to establish a Single Stop USA Center on campus, recognizing and responding to a similar need that My Brother's Keeper and ASAP address: providing easily accessible supports that meet student's holistic needs. Kingsborough's diverse student body has diverse needs. Single Stop USA helps students facing resource insecurity (food,

housing, finances) by providing supports like a food pantry (in partnership with Kingsborough's Office of Student Affairs) and financial services. Legal services are of great value to students facing challenges like credit problems and navigating America's complex immigration system. Since students do not always seek these services from their community college, Kingsborough has trained faculty on signs indicating students are struggling and in need of support. As KCC Participant C noted, "What's so evident is there's so much you have to address to get at what students are going through." Like Learning Communities or ASAP, Single Stop USA has fused with other programs to more effectively identify and meet students' needs. Despite some overlap in services (ASAP provides transportation security while Single Stop USA provides various other resource securities), data collected did not demonstrate coordination between advisors in ASAP and faculty connecting students to resources through Single Stop USA.

Students may not benefit from Learning Communities and Single Stop USA if they withdraw before even starting at Kingsborough, which inspired President Schrader to start the Welcome Wagon at Kingsborough. Beginning in Summer 2020 (amid the pandemic), President Schrader notified her admissions staff she wanted to begin personally welcoming new students to Kingsborough. This idea culminated in the Welcome Wagon, a set of trips around the greater Brooklyn area that President Schrader made (sometimes bringing powerful figures like the CUNY Chancellor and elected officials) to students' homes to welcome them to Kingsborough and personally deliver a gift bag to them before they officially set foot on campus as students. New students feel personally connected to President Schrader and contact her directly via email when they experience challenges and need support. President Schrader directly connects Kingsborough students to the offices or departments providing services needed, and asks those employees to follow up with a record of outreach done in response and how they resolved the

issue. Study participants spoke positively of the Welcome Wagon but did not link it with other programs like ASAP or Single Stop USA that have demonstrated transformational potential for Kingsborough.

Kingsborough's implementation of programs meant to help students in and out of the classroom, from before they set foot on (or first log in to access) campus to graduation, is driven by a desire to transform the student experience. It understands that simply creating or having boutique programs that are popular and gain attention for a time will not automatically transform the student experience. The challenge for Kingsborough is that exceptional programs like ASAP, Single Stop USA, and the Welcome Wagon risk functioning as boutique programs with transformational potential if they are not intentionally connected to create a comprehensive program supporting student success from enrollment to graduation. For the student experience to be transformed, supports have to be institutionalized across the college, absorbed into Kingsborough's culture, and validated by longitudinal data demonstrating sustained improvements in student outcomes. Literature on transformational change indicates that the student experience will continue to be transformed at Kingsborough as these exceptional programs are interconnected and facilitate greater communication and collaboration between units and departments at the college (Klein, 2017; Klempin & Karp, 2018; Rodicio, Mayer, & Jenkins, 2014).

### *Culture at Kingsborough*

Kingsborough's culture has prioritized focusing on strategy, equity, communication, and relationships, though without careful coordination these areas of focus risk remaining or becoming disconnected. As Kingsborough became focused on student success through programs like ASAP and Single Stop USA, it recognized the need to link organizational strategy with its

student success culture. Senior leadership holds strategic retreats that situate cross-college representation to chart a path forward for Kingsborough. The college holds an annual student success summit structured around the loss-momentum framework that presents disaggregated data, poses questions about equity gaps and areas for improvement, and forms breakout groups to discuss strategies for addressing issues. Faculty also have access to workshops that share information about Kingsborough students' backgrounds and explores the student experience to help faculty deepen their equity-mindedness and cultural responsiveness. In all these instances, Kingsborough wants to align its strategy with its culture of student success, rooting out policies and practices that create barriers to student success and perpetuate equity gaps. These settings are ideal for interconnecting efforts and forging a change narrative or organizational saga (Clark, 1972).

According to study participants, Kingsborough's culture is committed to equity and social justice. Administrators, faculty, and staff have come to use data to identify and raise consciousness about equity gaps. Kingsborough is looking at each phase of the student experience, from enrollment to beyond graduation, and working to match programs and interventions with specific equity gaps can impact. Kingsborough has held student focus groups to better understand how equity gaps impact and shape students' experiences in and out of the classroom at Kingsborough. Faculty are drawn to Kingsborough because of its diversity and commitment to equity, though they experience a tension here since their tenure process prioritizes other outcomes (like publications) over work done in the classroom to adopt culturally responsive pedagogical practices. One participant indicated that faculty want to prioritize their students but feel pulled away from students by the tenure process. The annual student success

summits at Kingsborough give everyone opportunities to increase equity-mindedness, share concerns related to equity, and continuously improve their practice.

Even with its devotion to equity and social justice, Kingsborough has had to confront recurrences of racism and discrimination at the college and in its community. Kingsborough has experienced allegations of and lawsuits charging discrimination, particularly pertaining to antisemitism. Participants recognized ethnic and religious discrimination that negatively impact the campus climate. Evolving hiring practices are helping to improve the campus climate to be more equity-driven, but KCC Participant A described “old guards” and longstanding power structures making progress with equity difficult. To curb the loss of African-American and Hispanic female faculty, Kingsborough created a Historically Underrepresented Faculty and Staff Resource Center to help confront explicit and implicit bias, mentor underrepresented faculty and staff, and participate in candid conversations about campus climate. As Kingsborough wrote in its 2019 Aspen Prize application, “As [Kingsborough] strives for a meaningful cultural shift, it is expected that the grassroots nature of our efforts, combined with consistent dialogue between this work and the college’s mission, will culminate in a campus united under one common goal.”

As Kingsborough continues to embed equity within its culture, it has also sought to steadily strengthen communication and gather stakeholder input with a relational focus. Early in its transformational change journey, Kingsborough had to be diligent with breaking down silos to foster innovation and collaboration under President Peruggi. Having cross-team collaboration, however, does not guarantee communication is happening broadly speaking across campus. Thus, President Schrader has prioritized increasing communication through reports of progress with interventions and data demonstrating student outcomes. Given the strength and involvement

of unions in CUNY, Kingsborough has made a practice of being proactive, forthcoming, and open with their union counterparts, giving them forewarning of issues emerging and asking for their input before undertaking important efforts like revising the faculty handbook or planning Kingsborough's reopening after the pandemic.

Kingsborough's struggles with discrimination as well as internal and external conflict, but participants noted that its culture has worked to be relational. Relationships have shifted as the college has centered its focus on student success, allowing for more collaboration and communication all aimed toward improving student success. There are times, however, when (according to KCC Participant C) Kingsborough's culture "is not friendly, communicative, or collaborative." When relationships breakdown and entrenchment occurs, transformational change tends to stall. Much of Kingsborough's transformational change process has included case-making for change and fostering a sense of participation and inclusion for faculty, staff, and administrators. Reflecting on a question about Kingsborough's culture, KCC Participant C observed that oftentimes college members involved value the same things (e.g., social justice) but struggle to see how changes happening promote those shared values for all parties involved. Implementing corequisites, for instance, took extensive debate and looking at data before faculty were ready to proceed. Kingsborough is finding increased communication is helpful in building consensus and allowing for sensemaking to occur, though data collected for this study indicate mistrust and competing priorities complicate the sensemaking process.

### *Looking Ahead for Kingsborough*

In recent years, Kingsborough has been working to connect crisis management to transformational change. It will need to draw from its current capacities and strengths as it takes on challenges like declining enrollment, equity, and strengthening external relations. One

participant noted that Kingsborough has been losing roughly 1,000 students per year in recent years. Between demographic shifts negatively impacting college enrollment in the Northeast (Grawe, 2018) and the pandemic accelerating enrollment declines across CUNY, Kingsborough has a “real challenge” figuring out how to “sustain itself” and curb enrollment declines, as KCC Participant B stated. KCC Participant also observed, “[N]one of what we have talked about [in this interview] is important if students don’t come [to Kingsborough].” Kingsborough is geographically difficult to reach in Brooklyn, serves a community with a strong economy (allowing residents to enter the workforce directly rather than going to college to obtain a credential or degree with labor market value enabling them to enter the workforce), and may need new programs to connect students to more opportunities at four-year colleges and universities accepting transfers and with local employers.

Kingsborough will continue to strengthen its commitment to and focus on equity, not just in how it pursues increasing enrollment by engaging traditionally underserved students but also with retention, graduation, and transfer. Having well-designed programs in place like learning communities and Single Stop in place is an important starting point. Academically, Kingsborough is promoting equity in the classroom by prioritizing professional development around culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogy. Now that data is more transparent, Kingsborough plans to carefully review policies and practices that data indicate are contributing to equity gaps, and change them so more students can be successful. Given that Kingsborough is part of CUNY and thus bound to system-wide policies, part of its efforts around equity will entail advocating for policy changes that reduce barriers not just for underserved students at Kingsborough but across the CUNY system. As President Schrader observed, “if we can crack

that nut [equity] then there will be something to compare: what happened with students of color then versus now.”

Kingsborough’s climate impacts how it is able to address equity and respond to inequities in student outcomes. It recognizes the need to address equity in its hiring practices so its faculty and staff are more representative of its highly diverse student body. Ongoing cases of discrimination and racism along the lines of ethnicity and religion are indicative of what KCC Participant C called “real deep issues” at Kingsborough. Participants noted that employees have a commitment to equity, yet as KCC Participant C shared, “they’re ready to kill each other sometimes. It’s this ... odd dichotomy of real deep issues.” Kingsborough has acknowledged the unhealthy aspects of its cultural and climate, and is engaging in important conversations about race and equity through professional development and with the help of its chief diversity officer. This organizational equity work will take years but is critical to Kingsborough’s ability to position itself to close equity gaps and increase student success for all students.

As Kingsborough prioritizes equity in terms of both its student outcomes and its organizational culture, it will also continue strengthening its external relations and community partnerships. The enrollment challenges already discussed have compelled Kingsborough to strengthen its ties to local high schools that feed their students to Kingsborough. Leadership transitions at high schools can make these relationships difficult to sustain, but the shared commitment to improving student success incentivizes ongoing partnerships. Kingsborough will also continue strengthening its partnership with community organizations to better support its adult student population, as well as groups of students with particular needs such as those with disabilities. As it increases its community connections and relationships, Kingsborough plans to

keep unions abreast of plans and developments to ensure they have an adequate voice and sufficient representation moving forward.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has presented case study findings for each of the three community colleges participating in this qualitative study of how transformational change happens at community colleges. The findings in this chapter are the results of my analysis of each college's 2019 Aspen Prize applications, interviews I conducted with presidents or chancellors and three leaders at each participating college, and supplemental documents that are publicly available. I triangulated the different data sources to validate claims made during interviews as well as contextualize factual information presented in college's Aspen Prize applications. This approach allowed for a comprehensive account of the transformational change process that has been strengthened through rigorous triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data collected for this study.

The next chapter will synthesize my research findings across the three community colleges participating in this study, but it is well to reflect briefly on the substantial differences between each college – Indian River, Pierce, and Kingsborough – to conclude this chapter. As elaborated in the next chapter, all three community colleges were compelled to undergo transformational change when they put student success at the forefront of why they do what they do as a community college. Indian River backed into student success by way of examining its culture and climate. The River Way became the cultural heartbeat of Indian River, establishing clear expectations of and goals for employees around increasing student success. Workgroups were created in place of nearly all the committees were ended (other than those necessary for requirements like accreditation), but this move signaled that Indian River was done meeting to meet and would convene cross-representative teams only with specific goals and deliverables as

well as a limited timeline for completing that work. It also tended to move the fastest with implementation and scaling programs like guided pathways, likely due to its entrepreneurial and calculated risk-taking culture.

Pierce approached transformational change through an uncompromising focus on its renewed mission and a vigorous use of data to guide its efforts to increase student success. Pierce embedded student success into its revised mission and built a culture that evaluates the extent to which any opportunity or intervention is geared toward student success and thus helps Pierce fulfill its mission. All three colleges participating in this study exhibited thorough use of data, but Pierce demonstrated exceptional vigor in its use of data. Pierce's data dashboards fostered an evidence-based culture where college members regularly and openly reflected on course outcomes and institutional effectiveness scorecards. Pierce's college-wide use of data has guided its efforts toward mission fulfillment amid the transformational change process.

Kingsborough's transformational change journey is unique based on three important factors: experiencing numerous challenges that have caused the change process to pause, still needing to interconnect the various student success programs with transformational potential, and needing to establish a narrative or organizational saga (Clark, 1972) about the transformational change process. All three colleges in this study have faced obstacles and setbacks throughout the change process (the pandemic being the most recent example), but the challenges Kingsborough has faced have halted the transformational change process that was underway. It shows signs of being able to reactivate the change process, but it will first need to forge a common purpose and strong vision for the path forward. Kingsborough leaders participating in this study spoke of the college's reputation for being innovative, but there was not a clear institutional narrative around transformational change. President Schrader indicated

that transformational change had only just begun at the onset of the pandemic, whereas from KCC Participant B's perspective it began roughly two decades ago when Learning Communities was conceived and implemented. Not having a shared institutional narrative, developed through collective sensemaking, makes understanding and conveying the arc of transformational change more difficult.

As demonstrated by research literature and seen in the three case studies presented in this chapter, transformational change does not happen in a standardized way or on a standardized timeline for community colleges. Primary factors compelling a community college to undertake transformational change vary: culture and climate (Indian River), data (Pierce), or implementing a student success intervention with a rippling impact across the organizational structure and culture (Kingsborough). Further, the timeline for transformational change varies, though as Kezar and Eckel (2003) observed, it does take substantial time to accomplish. Early on, the resistance posed to the transformational change executives announce varies in origin (what group or groups are resistant) and intensity (how strongly resisters object to the announced changes occurring). Executives and the leaders selected to lead the transformational change process deploy different sensemaking strategies, though student success is the rallying cry and data provides clear evidence for why change is needed. Community colleges adapt how they execute transformational change based on differing budgeting approaches, political context (e.g., negotiations and engagement with union leaders), and governance structures (trustees and their level of engagement, or in Kingsborough's case being part of a regional higher education system, CUNY). In short, there is no singular or right way to approach transformational change. Yet as I explain in the final chapter of this dissertation, synthesized data from this multi-site case study indicate there are key practices that are needed to successfully undergo transformational change.

## **Chapter 5: Findings, Implications, and Conclusion**

This dissertation has yielded insights into the transformational change process at community colleges through a thorough literature review and presentation of findings from a multi-site case study. This chapter presents synthesized findings based on each community college featured in a case study – Indian River State College, Pierce College District, and Kingsborough Community College – to answer the three research questions driving this study. The data yielded additional insights into the transformational change process that are unique to community colleges; these insights are also shared in this chapter. I conclude by reflecting on areas for further research and implications for the field.

### **Operationalizing Transformational Change at Community Colleges**

Research question 1 asked, *How are community colleges operationalizing the five key strategies Kezar and Eckel identified to undertake the change process of building institutional capacity?* The presupposition embedded within this research question is that community colleges participating in this study were indeed operationalizing the five key strategies, which the data collected indicated was indeed occurring. Each of the five strategies Kezar and Eckel (2002) identified as critical to the transformational change process – senior administrative support, collaborative leadership, robust design, effective communication, and visible action – appeared throughout the data collected.

#### *Senior Administrative Support*

At all three community colleges, the president or chancellor played a pivotal role in the transformational change process. IRSC Participant C recalled that at Indian River, President Massey persisted in infusing student success into Indian River's culture, which he talked about during every presentation he delivered on and off campus: “[President] Massey said we were

never relenting, never backing up from our focus on being about student success.” Similarly, IRSC Participant A observed that President Massey effectively engaged Indian River’s community well. Though organizationally Indian River operated with a top-down approach, President Massey (according to IRSC Participant B) essentially told employees, “You have our support, so go do it.” Similarly, Chancellor Johnson played a central and pivotal role in Pierce’s student success work. A “hallmark of [the student transformational change] at Pierce,” according to PC Participant B, was Chancellor Johnson leading Pierce’s student success work when the district joined ATD, with Dr. Thomas Broxson (then District Dean of Natural Science at Pierce) leading the data team alongside her. The two planned and strategized about team meetings ahead of time with Dr. Broxson and paved the way for the work to move forward. Having the college executive close to if not directly involved in interventions critical to the transformational change process helped clear barriers, increase momentum, and spark interest across their college or district.

Strong senior administrative support was critical to Kingsborough’s transformational change process, with the strengths of each president impacting the phases of Kingsborough’s transformation. The presidents discussed most were President Peruggi and President Schrader. Both presidents prioritized using their executive office to facilitate connections across their college and empower student success work to try to move forward, though obstacles to progress have stalled the change process in recent years at Kingsborough. Of the three community colleges participating in this study, Kingsborough is the only college that had multiple presidents through the transformational change process. The data I collected for this study did not demonstrate how incoming presidents crafted a narrative of Kingsborough’s saga, one that accounted for growth during past presidencies and set a clear vision for the next phase of growth.

### *Collaborative Leadership*

All three community colleges in this study exhibited strong collaborative leadership. Soon after completing its 360 degree culture assessment, Indian River President Massey implemented workgroups at Indian River that were time-limited and tasked with specific goals and deliverables. These workgroups quickly demonstrated an ability to make progress and accomplish deliverables rather than get stalled during meetings. The leaders chairing these workgroups effectively fostered collaboration of their cross-representative teams as the groups moved toward accomplishing their goals. Pierce adopted a similar approach without their committees being time-limited. In most cases, Pierce invites from the district's three campuses to participate in committees and provide input. College members come and go on committees, but the open-door approach works well for garnering college-wide support and ensuring everyone feels their interests are represented. Kingsborough has strong leaders in place, though increased coordination of efforts and communication about their work could help resume the transformational change process.

### *Robust Design*

Each of the three colleges participating in this study planned carefully how they would implement key programs and interventions leading to the transformational change process. Indian River structured its transformational change work around the five areas identified as critical to the college's culture: purpose; strong and viable organization; learning environment; future students; and communication. The workgroups formed responded directly to these institutional and cultural needs. Pierce formed open, cross-representative teams that used data to steer their work and professional development to ready college members to complete the work at hand. These groups fused their work wherever appropriate so that everything was interconnected

and jointly worked toward mission fulfillment. Kingsborough's Learning Communities (now known as ASAP) fostered connections between offices and departments by having knowledgeable and trained advisors who, beyond their teaching, can counsel students in how to resolve academic challenges and utilize the host of resources and student supports available through various programs at Kingsborough.

### *Staff Development*

Community colleges that have successfully undergone transformational change have invested significantly in staff development. Indian River's institutional effectiveness office regularly provides internal professional development (oftentimes bringing in external experts to present and conduct training) to equip its college members with the skills needed to meet students' needs. For example, the entrepreneurial culture at Indian River encourages and incentivizes college members to learn and grow through participating in exploratory grant-funded projects. At Pierce, the Center for Engagement and Learning (CEAL) positions faculty to engage in and learn from action research projects meant to create a more inclusive classroom and strengthen learning outcomes for students. In response to a question about Pierce's use of data, PC Participant C described how CEAL and the action research projects at Pierce have trained faculty "in really tearing apart their classes and ... looking at the data: who is successful and who is not ... and then putting a change in place ... and measuring whether that change worked or not." All district days and other professional development opportunities offered by Pierce's Employee Learning and Development (ELAD) provide additional professional development opportunities to classified staff professionals in addition to faculty.

### *Visible Action*

Community colleges in this study demonstrated a notable focus on making visible the action occurring amid the transformational change process through their communication strategies. Each of the three colleges used all-college or all-district days to disseminate important information. The cross-representation in these college's committees or workgroups allowed for information to be effectively channeled across the college or district. The president or chancellor also regularly shared updates and information about the college's progress with its interventions and the outcomes each is having on student success. Indian River's workgroups address issues and opportunities over a limited time period, with results appearing by the end of the workgroup. Pierce's annual budget process brings together representatives from across the district to reflect on where cuts can be made based on limited outcomes, what interventions are continuing to show positive results, and new programs or interventions showing promising evidence of further increasing student success. Kingsborough's monthly updates from the President and vice presidents is beginning to increase awareness of student success work underway and what outcomes the college is seeing from that work. What results from this is a stronger culture at each college, as people take courage when they see clear goals toward which they are working, positive signs of progress, and a greater sense of connection and community with their colleagues along the way.

### **Sensemaking amid Transformational Change**

#### *Sensemaking and Research Question 2*

Research question 2 asked, *How are these community colleges' leaders and core teams undergoing sensemaking amid the change process of building institutional capacity?* As seen in the literature review (chapter 2), how leaders frame (or make sense of change) for themselves

and then convey this framing to college members influences how the college and its culture understands and responds to change (Coburn, 1998; Eddy, 2003; Senge, 1990; Spillane, 2000; Weick, 1995). The sensemaking process is complex because explicit and implicit changes happen simultaneously, and college members have to process changes occurring based on executive sensemaking offered against their experiences (which can lead to experiencing double consciousness) (Cejda & Leist, 2013; Levin et al, 2013). As change continues and college members see positive change happening, their sensemaking leads to greater comfort with what is occurring and willingness to actively participate in the change process (Amey, 2005; Eddy, 2006; Eddy, 2010; O'Banion, 1997). The findings from this study validated Kezar and Eckel's (2002) claim that organizational sensemaking occurs throughout the transformational change process and impacts how organizations reframe around the changes happening.

As described in this section, the presidents or chancellors played a central role in guiding college members' thinking, particularly early on when the executive announced her or his institution would be embarking on a path that would fundamentally alter how the college operated. College members asked similarly challenging questions of the change process and worked through hesitations, objections, and resistance to the change happening. In addition to the platforms for collective sensemaking that Kezar and Eckel (2002) cited (staff development sessions, workshops, symposia, town halls, and retreats), colleges in this study used all-college or all-district days, affinity groups, and committees and workgroups. College members at community colleges in this study tended to engage in sensemaking in platforms that were focused on professional development or action, whereas many of the platforms identified by Kezar and Eckel (2002) encourage reflection on past work rather than planning for the work ahead.

A distinct difference between the sensemaking process at the two four-year colleges or universities Kezar and Eckel (2002) studied and the three community colleges studied here is the use of data throughout the sensemaking process. Seeing stark data around student outcomes that show suboptimal results – and troubling equity gaps within student outcomes identified through data disaggregation – created urgency among community college leaders and their college members in this study. Upon seeing low student outcomes and equity gaps in their data, community college leaders signaled to their institutions that increasing student success for all students. Students historically underserved by higher education at large and more precisely their community college would be the primary focus of their institutions moving forward. College members needed time to build data literacy and interrogate their institutional data, but as they became familiarized with data, they became advocates for student success who wanted to improve their practice through evidence-based data and measure the impact of those adopted practices.

Indian River began its sensemaking around the results of the 360 degree assessment it completed to assess its culture. Starting from a sense of being disconnected from Indian River college members, President Massey used the assessment to gauge where Indian River could improve. The results indicated that Indian River college members could accelerate change if they were encouraged to devise and implement innovative ideas, not just uphold policies, procedures, and rules. Initially, college members were concerned about repercussions if their innovations underperformed or failed. But as President Massey noted, a big shift in college members' thinking occurred when they realized they were safe and even free to try new things: “Wow. When we got the masses of people [at Indian River] thinking that way and functioning that way and going that way, ... it set the table for major transformations within our community.”

Sensemaking at Indian River revolved around discovering that college members can innovate to achieve greater student success and in the process feel more engaged and fulfilled in their jobs; they can grow professionally as their students achieve greater outcomes.

For Pierce, sensemaking happened largely through the process of revising Pierce's mission and then establishing data literacy for college members across the district. Mission statements are the heartbeat of higher education institutions (as for many public, private, and nonprofit organizations), and remain in place longer than important documents like strategic plans and continuous improvement plans related to accreditation (Ayers, 2011). Pierce's decision to revise its mission statement in the wake of data showing low completion outcomes signaled to the college community that Chancellor Johnson and Pierce's board were serious about and committed to fundamentally changing the district. Pierce began looking at and using data in every decision it was making, and expanded to rely on assessment to formalize how it measured outcomes. Similar to Indian River's initial unease around innovation, Pierce college members initially mistrusted the data, fearing it would be used to punish and blame people. Over time and with training, employees accepted data as a tool for featuring the good work they are doing and the results that work is having on student success. They also came to appreciate data for its ability to help them hone their skills and practice to refine how they support students across the district. As PC Participant C recalled, "Once we had data to show that we had done something and it had changed those data points [student outcomes], then there started to be a lot more buy-in." College members discovered data could be used to guide efforts and then show cause for celebration when student outcomes increase.

Because of the interruption of transformational change and the lack of a coherent organizational saga, sensemaking at Kingsborough has been less influential to date. It is normal

and well for college members to have different perspectives on the change process based on their unique backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences (Weick, 1995). In the case of Kingsborough, though, the sensemaking process has not yet culminated in a unified narrative of the change process. Whereas non-executive participants at Indian River and Pierce summarized and then reflected on their executive's sensemaking narrative, non-executive Kingsborough participants varied in their starting points for and account of the change process at Kingsborough. Their narratives coincided with the time period during which they have been at Kingsborough and the work they have been directly involved in while at the college. They acknowledged attempts by President Schrader to restore communication and break down rebuilt silos that had formed, but more work remains to be done to unify and strengthen the college's culture, focus college members on a singular goal, and restore momentum lost when the transformational change process halted. As Kingsborough seeks to weather its challenges and resume transformational change, it will likely need to engage in "ongoing cultural cultivation" as President Schrader continues leading with an emphasis on achieving equity and greater student success (Phelan, 2016, n. pag.).

### *Transformational Change and Sensemaking Theory*

This dissertation contributes three insights to the literature on sensemaking in higher education. One insight is that data is central to the sensemaking process at community colleges. As Eddy (2005) indicated, college members do work to make sense of the change process by building mental maps from their past experience (Weick, 1995). How community college presidents act as sensegivers to and liaise sensegiving between different college member groups from trustees to executive cabinets, faculty, and classified staff professionals further impacts the change process (Eddy, 2006; Epstein, 2015; Gonzales, 2013; Thayer, 1988). This study indicates

that when undertaking transformational change, community college presidents infuse data into the sensemaking process they conduct and present their sensegiving using compelling data. These data may begin with student success (as with Pierce) or begin with organizational culture and turn to student success for indicators of organizational improvement (as with Indian River). But data are central to turning the attention of presidents, trustees, and college members toward students and their outcomes. Data around student outcomes ensure the transformational change centers on students rather than simply following trends in higher education or seeking to increase institutional prestige within the higher education industry.

This study has also found that community colleges committing to transformational change have to address equity in the sensemaking process. The literature on sensemaking theory has connected with critical race theory and social identity theory to show the ways in which faculty of color grapple with when making sense of their institutions (Levin et al, 2013). Participants in this study, who were predominantly white, wrestled with systemic injustice in higher education, white supremacy, privilege, and white fragility. These difficult issues *de facto* arise when confronting disaggregated data showing equity gaps in student outcomes and reflecting on what accounts for those equity gaps. With transformational change, the sensemaking process entails seeking to better understand the student experience from the various perspectives of historically underserved students. Along with the student experience, sensemaking here also entails reckoning with how higher education perpetuates systemic inequality and racism, and invites college members at all levels to identify how they may have perpetuated these injustices and what they will do to change course.

As community colleges make longitudinal gains in student success with an emphasis on equity, their sensemaking begins extending its organizational saga to narrate the change process

(Clark, 1972). As Amey (2005) has shown, sensemaking necessitates a learning orientation, as leadership entails continuous learning. Further, success stories naturally emerge as change occurs, accounting for both explicit changes (policies, for example) and implicit changes (such as culture) (Eckel, Green & Hill, 2001; Cejda & Leist, 2013). These stories coalesce into a revision and extension of the community college's organizational saga, thanks largely to the president's effort to guide and synthesize these stories into a coherent narrative. Data collected for this study indicate that transformational change is explained within an extended organizational saga using a narratological archetype:

1. Presidents encountered data that convey, directly or indirectly, an urgent need to improve student success.
2. Presidents begin the sensemaking process around how to shift the institutional focus to student success and build a culture of student success, and sensegive to trustees and college members.
3. With the support of trustees, presidents deploy key strategies for transformational change while embedding student success at the core of the community college (e.g., a revised mission statement or operational handbook).
4. Finally, college members and its governing board collectively reorient the community college's organizational saga to hinge on the adoption of student success and work toward increasing student outcomes.

Given the central role presidents play in the archetype for transformational change narratives, it is well for the same president to remain through the change process and contemplate leaving the community college once the culture and infrastructure are in place to sustain the improvement made.

### **How Strategies for Transformational Change Interconnect**

Research question 3 asked, *To what extent are these community colleges interweaving the five key strategies Kezar and Eckel identified as they [the community colleges] undertake the change process of building institutional capacity?* All three community colleges studied in this dissertation have thoroughly interwoven the five key strategies Kezar and Eckel (2002) identified as critical to transformational change. What is more, the data indicate that transformational change necessitates that community colleges interweave these five strategies; to do less than that would be to implement change but not at a transformational level. Kezar and Eckel (2002) noted that senior administrative support was critical to the early stages of the transformational change process, an insight which this study has supported through its findings. An important nuance to the findings of this study is that robust design, staff development, and visible action have to happen continuously for transformational change to stay the course. The design initially shaped for transformational change may stay in place, but colleges needed the option of these designs and the people doing this work to adjust as the transformational change process continues. Staff development has to occur continuously, and cannot be limited to the start of the transformational change process. Finally, visible action has to persist, if not increase, throughout the transformational change process, as visibility offers validation of the work's impact, a sense of momentum for college members, and clarity within the college community of what is happening at any point in time.

### **Why Transformational Change Happens at Community Colleges**

In terms of community colleges, Kezar and Eckel's key strategies for transformational change cover the operational and structural components, the *how* of transformational change. Further, they acknowledged the cultural shifts that can occur as the sensemaking process

transpires, both as executives sort through the change for themselves and then as college members adapt that rationale for change themselves. This study confirmed two key components to how transformational change happens: ongoing executive leadership and whole-college or whole-district engagement in the change process. Another unique outcome this study of community colleges was its insights into how community colleges understood and articulated *why* their community college was engaging in transformational change.

An executive's longevity was clearly associated with transformational change based on the data collected for this study. Both President Massey of Indian River and Chancellor Johnson of Pierce led or have been leading the change process for over a decade. Kingsborough experienced the most transformational change during the decade President Peruggi was the chief executive at Kingsborough. A long-term presidency or chancellorship can provide the stability, consistency, and long-term vision needed to lead the transformational change process, assuming the executive has the competencies needed for this arduous process. Changes in leadership raise questions of whether a community college's efforts will begin moving in a different direction, and changes in direction can jeopardize the progress made to date during the transformational change process. Presidents and chancellors have a critical role in commissioning the transformational change process, garnering support at the governance level with trustees, empowering college members to effect change, and speaking at all levels to the cultural and practical changes happening to guide sensemaking over multiple years.

While presidents and chancellors play a critical role in the change process, transformational change necessitates whole-college or whole-district engagement. Existing literature on change management (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Stout, 2016) has noted this, and this study has validated the literature. Whole-college or whole-district

engagement entails more than holding an annual all-college or all-district day, although such events hold value and potential. Whole-college or whole-district engagement entails widespread sharing of and reflection on institutional data, tracking of institutional effectiveness metrics, and cross-representative workgroups or committees that design interventions for student success and engage everyone at the community college in the change process. Indian River accomplished whole-college engagement by creating a culture of innovation in pursuit of student success. Pierce accomplished whole-district engagement through data democratization and an open door model to committee work. As shown in the case study of Kingsborough, the student success programs with transformational potential (chiefly, learning communities, or ASAP, and Single Stop) will accelerate transformational change once they are more intentionally interconnected. Transformational change can be initiated with an exceptional program focused on student success, but such change only takes hold once entire colleges embrace and engage in the change process.

Each college's *why* substantiated the launch of transformational change at these community colleges, and it inculcated cultures defined by continuous improvement. Indian River's *why* pertained to strengthening the college's culture by helping employees grow professionally and feel they belong at the college so they in turn are better positioned to help students. Pierce's *why* stems from embedding students into the district's core mission and making every decision based on whether or not the matter in question is or will be good for students. Kingsborough's *why* stems from its appreciation of the tremendous diversity of its students, and wanting to provide programs that equip people from all over the world who have come to call New York City home to be successful in their educational pursuits. Once this rationale for transformational change is in place, there are (based on data collected and analyzed

for this study) key traits appear that largely define the college's culture and new mode of operating as a student-serving institution (as opposed to the traditional model of higher education, which emphasizes knowledge creation and dissemination with limited emphasis on students and their success) (Patton, 2016).

### *Student Success Culture*

First, *the community college's culture reforms to center on student success*. Community colleges need to continue standard practices like generating full-time equivalent (FTE) funding through enrollment, institutional reporting, maintaining accreditation, and more. But transformational change at community colleges necessitates shifting to a culture centered on student success. Key concepts or institutional logics persist (Kezar & Bernstein-Sierra, 2020), but they are redefined once the culture adopts a focus on student success. One college executive cited academic rigor as an example, noting its meaning shifted from how well students met faculty expectations and course requirements to how well faculty created and taught effectively within an inclusive learning environment that helps students be successful in that course and in subsequent courses. When this happens, higher education at community colleges becomes less about the institution's reputation or preservation of academic heritage (a problematic notion of which we are increasingly aware, wrapped up as it is in structural injustice and white supremacy) (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1996; Patton, 2016; Thelin, 2019). Instead, community colleges become a haven where people of all backgrounds, including those historically underserved by higher education, can come to gain abilities, skills, competencies, and credentials that assert their human, social, and economic worth in their communities, thanks to the supports in and out of the classroom they receive.

However direct or indirect a community college's approach to student success, its college-wide cultural adoption of student success begins to reconfigure every program, policy, and practice to fit students' needs. Community colleges codify their cultural shift to being student-centered by placing student success within the community college's mission (like Pierce) or its employee handbook (e.g., Indian River's *River Way*). It might also happen naturally as college members see how the multiple roles they can play in students' accomplishments inspires them to prioritize student success (Kingsborough's Learning Communities, for instance). As one participant remarked, "It's a matter of taking the initial effort to get students involved, to tear down barriers. Turn students loose, and they'll be successful. All these barriers block students." Having a culture of student success entails recognizing students want to achieve their goals but need community colleges and their employees to remove unnecessary barriers and adopt equitable and inclusive practices that help them learn, persist, and complete their chosen credential or degree.

Community college leaders can move their institutions toward a culture of student success by identifying core documents that relate to the institutional mission and commission the revision of those documents to center on student success. In recent years, mission statements have focused on workforce readiness in an era of globalization (Ayers, 2011). Employee documents like handbooks are written to make expectations clear but become static if they guide practice but do not impact culture. The core document or documents may differ between colleges (as with Indian River and Pierce). But when community college leaders have one of these central documents changed to center on student success, they have a mission-related focal point that centers on student success to begin using as the basis for driving change.

Regularly addressing student success during key institutional events like all-college or all-district days can also build the college's culture around student success. All three colleges participating in this study addressed student success during all-college or all-district days, which reiterated to college members that the focus on student success was still in place. Non-executive participants at Indian River described how President Massey spoke about culture during every presentation he delivered, and over time it had a reinforcing effect around student success for college members. Beyond its all-district day, Pierce's annual budgeting process linked funding to student success based on what data indicate is most positively impacting students and their success. Culture changes at community colleges when leaders strategically select key college settings to demonstrate and reiterate the college's growing commitment to student success (--).

#### *Data-Driven Culture*

Second, *data directs efforts to increase student success*. Improvement science is best known for the (evidence-based) claim that “[w]e cannot improve at scale what we cannot measure” (Bryk et al, 2015). While true, this claim presupposes we – community college practitioners, in this context – know what we need to improve at scale. Transformational change needs an impetus to commence, and data demonstrating low student outcomes and revealing equity gaps provides the critical motivation to fundamentally change course. “It rattled us to the core”; “How is this even possible?”; “We became stunned by discrepancies and achievement gaps”; “Our data [on student outcomes] is troubling”: throughout this study, shock and disbelief at seeing low student outcomes and unsettling equity gaps sparked urgency among college leaders to undergo transformational change. One participant spoke of assessment data capturing the human lives positively impacted by student success interventions being implemented. An uncomfortable truth found in the data collected for this study, however, is that data depicting the

ways in which community colleges are failing human lives – the lives of students turning to community colleges for access to opportunities for growth and advancement – first has to unsettle community colleges to take action on behalf of their students (Cohen-Vogel et al, 2015; Felix & Castro, 2018).

As the transformational change process continues, college members increase their data literacy and engage in conversations around institutional and assessment data. Transformational change led community colleges in this study to make data widely available using various strategies: vice presidents emailing data monthly to college members in reports (Kingsborough), creating dashboards available college- or district-wide (Pierce), or adopting student information systems like Workday to streamline multiple data sources about students into one platform accessible college-wide to employees (Indian River). Similarly, creating institutional effectiveness scorecards and making them readily available allows college members to get a sense of progress, and therefore momentum, as longitudinal gains in student success become apparent. Conversations around these data emerge and increase in frequency in formal settings (e.g., all-college or all-district days, professional development sessions) and informal ones (proverbial water cooler conversations, for instance). Once college members gain data literacy, shared data leads to shared understandings of what has been accomplished and what is ahead (Dejean et al, 2018).

Community college leaders can begin creating an evidence-based culture by regularly presenting and reflecting on data during addresses, convocations, board updates, and communications. Based on the findings of this study, college members may initially question the validity of data, but college members will become more comfortable with and trusting of the data as they (data) are used and presented and leaders guide the sensemaking process. Making data

available to college members through resources like dashboards and in written communications further moves the college culture toward being evidence-based by increasing the circulation and consumption of data (Tirol-Carmody et al, 2020). For transformational change to occur, community colleges need to be data-rich but also data-selective – in other words, they collect ample data but know how to form research questions and drill down to correct data that will steer their improvement efforts (López, 2014).

Having data in circulation and sensemaking to help college members with understanding data is an important starting point, but college members need formal training and development to fully grasp data and become data literate (Cejda & Leist, 2013). Taken alone, sensemaking and sharing data only legitimize data from an administrative level, conveying to college members that (agree or disagree with them) the data are accepted at the college as the truth. As college members gain data literacy, they have opportunities to explore institutional data, discover how it can explain phenomena they are seeing, and suggest areas for targeted interventions (Baker & Sax, 2012). For many college members, leaders and data experts need to demonstrate how to interpret and react to data. As college members increase their data literacy, they are better positioned to pursue innovative interventions and measure the impact of their efforts (LaManna, 2019).

### *Equity*

Third, *equity becomes a moral imperative*. Equity gaps abound in the wake of decades if not centuries of white supremacy, social injustice, and systemic inequalities that have disadvantaged minoritized groups (Welton, Owens & Zamani-Gallaher, 2018). Finding these equity gaps at community colleges is not difficult, as it generally entails disaggregating data and collecting qualitative data about the student experience from minoritized students (Sidman-

Taveau & Hoffman, 2019; Torres, Hagedorn, & Heacock, 2018). Based on the case studies in this study, college members are startled by what they find and lament that “This isn’t good enough” in response to the equity gaps they identify through data disaggregation. Further, these colleges refuse to accept the “rising tide lifts all boats” approach because this does not close equity gaps, and therefore allows systemic injustices within higher education to perpetuate. For community colleges committed to transformational change around student success, equity becomes a moral imperative, a natural and necessary extension of their commitment to student success. The transformational change process inevitably confronts community colleges with equity as the epicenter of student success (Bragg & Durham, 2012; Rodriguez, 2015).

Community colleges develop equity-mindedness as they interrogate equity gaps in their data, evaluate structural barriers to minoritized groups being successful, and explore and implement student supports designed to propel historically underserved students to success (McNair, Bensimon, & Malcom-Piqueux, 2020; White & Dache, 2020). In the classroom, equity-mindedness entails reflecting on how to adjust syllabi, course expectations, and pedagogical strategies to create a culturally inclusive learning environment (Magloire, 2019; Parker et al, 2016). Outside of the classroom, equity-mindedness compels faculty and classified staff professionals alike to design student supports that meet students’ financial, familial, health-related, and social needs, and actively connect minoritized and underserved students to these critical supports (White & Dache, 2020). In terms of governance, leadership, and management, equity-mindedness commissions executive cabinet members and trustees to critically evaluate every institutional policy and practice, with a willingness to discontinue those that perpetuate systemic injustice, alter those that do not lead to equitable outcomes, and adopt those that clearly address gaps and provide critical supports to help underserved students be successful (Chase et

al, 2014; Cuellar & Gándara, 2021). As PC Participant A said about equity, “Nobody’s exempt from the work.” To adopt equity-mindedness is to accept each of us has a role to play in equity.

As community colleges develop their equity-mindedness amid transformational change, they grapple with what it means to be an anti-racist institution (McNair, Bensimon, & Malcom-Piqueux, 2020). The most egregious equity gaps tend to run along racial lines, with Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students being most adversely impacted by these gaps. Racial equity is thus an important starting point for community colleges in their equity work, though where and how to start is not immediately clear, as “to achieve racial equity in education not only do individuals’ mindsets need to be shifted to a more anti-racist ideology, but the institutions in which they work need to make profound anti-racist changes as well” (Welton, Owens, & Zamani-Gallaher, 2018, p. 2). Even if community colleges do not officially commit to becoming an anti-racist institution like Pierce, the task of adopting an anti-racist approach to student success that extends beyond the classroom to the entire institution remains for equity to truly manifest amid transformational change (By, 2005). This work is still in relative infancy but after the summer of racial reckoning in 2020, community colleges committed to student success increasingly recognize the desperate urgency to integrate racial equity and anti-racism into their student success agenda (McKenzie, 2020).

Community college leaders can take numerous steps to guide their college culture toward embracing equity. Most immediately, leaders can commission institutional data to be disaggregated to reveal equity gaps, followed by mapping the student experience and conducting a policy audit to locate flashpoints where inequities emerge and grasp how they impact the student experience (Cuellar & Gándara, 2021; Sidman-Taveau & Hoffman, 2019; Torres, Hagedorn, & Heacock, 2018). Once these data are gathered, leaders can plan to hold college- or

district-wide convenings to share these findings and facilitate discussion around why these gaps exist and what can be done to remedy them (Rodriguez, 2015).

Reflecting on data around equity gaps without support can be difficult for college members, so college leaders should also explore ways of helping them make sense of equity and become equity-minded (Felix et al, 2015). Some college members think of equity and equality as synonymous, a perspective rooted in an attempt at fairness in how they support students but inadvertently sanctioning and perpetuating inequities to persist (McNair, Bensimon, & Malcom-Piqueux, 2020). As data collected from Pierce indicated, some college members also need time to reflect on how their personal viewpoints align and diverge from the college's commitment to and stance on equity. Some may determine their views no longer align with the college and depart as a result. Others may over time reconcile their views over time or act in accordance with the college's view while working without changing their personal views.

Finally, community colleges leaders should deliberate on whether to formally become an anti-racist college. What exactly this means for colleges is still unclear, as Pierce college participants indicated. But racial equity is an important starting point for colleges looking to embrace equity, as many of the most egregious injustices and inequities follow along the lines of race (Harper, 2012). Colleges committing to become an anti-racist institution will work to root out policies and practices that espouse racism, address equity gaps along racial lines, and design and provide supports that position underserved students to be successful. Addressing racial equity alone will not achieve comprehensive equity across the college, but the lessons learned through this process will guide efforts to increase equity in terms of gender and sexuality, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ability/disability, and religion (McNair, Bensimon, & Malcom-Piqueux, 2020). Even colleges with predominantly white students should consider becoming an

anti-racist institution, as racism persists not just in student outcomes but in curricula, pedagogy, and traditional higher education practices.

### *Continuous Improvement*

Fourth, *continuous improvement creates learning communities among college members.*

All three community colleges turned to professional development when institutional data demonstrated areas where student outcomes would likely increase once college members received training and development to help them better serve students in and out of the classroom. Community colleges may opt to provide targeted professional development in response to these data, or they may create structures wherein college members develop interventions directly in response to areas they could better serve their students (Goomas, 2014; Strickland-Davis, Kosloski, & Reed, 2020). All-college and all-district days bring college members together to collectively reflect on the challenges their students face and learn about promising practices they can adopt to meet students' needs. Institutional effectiveness offices play a critical role in establishing assessment metrics, scorecards, and dashboards that allow college members to monitor gains in student success as the change process continues (Goomas, 2014).

Community college leaders can ensure continuous improvement is occurring by linking professional development to institutional effectiveness. As discussed earlier, data can indicate where college members need development to meet students' needs. Offices of institutional effectiveness can support faculty and classified staff with adapting interventions to help students and measuring their impact on student outcomes (Manning, 2011). Scorecards are useful for annually tracking progress in student outcomes as interventions improve over time and are scaled to impact more students (Jenkins, 2007). Offices of institutional effectiveness are well positioned to coordinate professional development since they are focused on assessment and outcomes,

which helps the college avoid adopting boutique programs not explicitly tied to student outcomes (Manning, 2011).

### *Representation and Cross-College Engagement*

Finally, *representation leads to assent and engagement across the college.*

Representation happens primarily through opportunities for college members to provide input on and engage in the student success work through committees, work groups, or task forces (Grasmick, Davies, & Harbour, 2012). Representation leads to a sense of shared ownership in and responsibility for the student success work underway (Johnson & Jones, 2018). Community colleges participating in this study exerted considerable effort to ensure unions, boards, and community economic development councils and chambers are also represented in the student success work. Pierce does this particularly well, both in how it trains and equips its board to advance the college's student success work with a concentration on equity and its annual budgeting process, which includes union leaders along with Pierce leaders. Representation leads to trust, assent, and support of student success work (Lloyd, 2016; Slantcheva-Durst, 2014).

Community college leaders can shift to time-limited committees or workgroups, and adopt open-door policies to participation in these groups. All three colleges in this study indicated that representation of key groups like faculty and unions reduces resistance by honoring and including their perspectives as stakeholders. Indian River's practice of limiting the duration of workgroups suggests that community college leaders should at least require workgroups or committees have clear outcomes and track progress toward those outcomes, with outcomes evolving if leaders choose to keep workgroups or committees as permanent. Finally, establishing open-door policies for workgroups and committees can increase representation while sparking innovation and collaboration. Pierce's practice of allowing college members to

participate when they are able and step away when not led to transparency and greater support in the work that resulted from committees. Community college leaders may choose only to allow for comments from college members not on committees if there is a merited concern about stagnation due to too much input. Nonetheless, greater representation and participation have an impact on the college culture and how college members involve themselves with student success (Locke & Guglielmino, 2006; Shults, 2008).

### **Implications for the Field**

#### *Implications for Practitioners*

There are three central implications for the field coming out of this study. First, *transformational change begins with cultural change*. Data stirs community colleges to adopt a focus on student success, and discovering equity gaps within institutional data kindles the equity moral imperative. But transformational change does not begin with immediate actions like forming a strategic plan, implementing a potentially transformative intervention, or investing in new technology. Transformational change at community colleges begins with people, who engage in sensemaking around the data and collectively rethink the purpose of their community college and their responsibility to the students who turn to and enroll there (Lloyd, 2016; Stout, 2016). As IRSC Participant C stated, “We brought student success to the front, and we saw big changes.” The community college culture needs time to become student-focused and equity-minded before it is ready to take action. The changed institutional culture benefits from formally embedding student success into its mission, employee handbook, or other resources dictating the purpose and aim of operations at the community college.

Second, *existing and new interventions need to be interconnected and tied to the student success focus and fit within the college’s culture, with data steering and determining what*

*interventions are adopted and then assessing their impact.* Relying solely on one intervention or program (e.g., guided pathways) to induce transformational change is risky, given the siloed nature in which many community colleges operate and the need for transformational change to be college-wide in scope and reach, not just housed within one unit (e.g., academics) (Klempin & Klein, 2018). Student success initiatives and interventions synergize and strengthen when college members communicate about the work and collaborate on how to interconnect efforts (Kadlec & Rowlett, 2014). In Kingsborough's case, learning communities exhibited great student outcomes but benefited from being interconnected with Single Stop USA and other supports to collectively help students be successful. Technology can help interconnect efforts and intervention touchpoints with students, as seen with Indian River's adoption and use of Workday (Gambino, 2017; Martinez, 2018). When interventions are interconnected, campus members collaborate more and the college culture strengthens its sense of community.

Finally, *community colleges will persist in a traditional model of higher education unless they adopt an innovative approach to student success, with funding following innovation and not the inverse.* Amid looming challenges like declining enrollment, many community college leaders and their boards take a risk-averse response precisely at a time when innovation and entrepreneurialism are needed (*Crisis*, 2013). Much of Indian River's success has stemmed from developing innovative ideas and then acquiring funding from public and private entities to implement their innovations. Pierce's Title III grant led to tremendous innovation among faculty; additionally, Pierce's embedded innovation within its budgeting process by asking every department or office to propose an innovation along with 1-2 percent budget cuts they can absorb. Federal, state, and local funding across America are likely to continue declining, and dwindling funding discourages innovation. How community colleges choose to budget for

innovation can vary, but transformational change invariably compels community colleges to innovate and then find funding to finance innovation (*Crisis*, 2013; Goldstein, 2012).

### *Policy Implications*

The findings of this study also lead to policy implications. One policy implication is that community college trustees should endeavor to appoint presidents or chancellors committed to leading long-term at their institution. The average length of community college presidencies has declined in recent years to just over five years (Gluckman, 2017). For executives, however, enacting transformational change often requires at least a decade to complete. According to Eckel and Trower (2019), “The environment in which most colleges and universities find themselves demands that they develop capacities for long-term institutional change” (p. 151). Both Indian River and Pierce had executives in office through the transformational change process. Granted, in both cases these executives made the case for transformational change to their boards, which led to support at the governance level. More doctoral programs in community college leadership and executive training programs are casemaking and preparing current and future executives for transformational change (Smith, 2017). But trustees can accelerate developments in the field around student success, equity, and institutional transformation (Phelan, 2021).

Trustees can advance transformational change in different ways. They can be explicit in the hiring process that the next executive will be responsible for leading the transformational change process (Phelan, 2021). Trustees can also develop evaluation criteria for executives around prioritizing student success and equity, and allocate resources to support executives receiving professional development to meet these performance standards. Trustee membership changes over time, so trustees can partner with executives on developing an onboarding process

for new trustees. Equity-minded trustees can begin by onboarding a new trustee in partnership with the executive and codify the general onboarding process for the executive to follow moving forward (Brekken et al, 2021; Phelan, 2021).

Trustees can position their community college for transformational change, but federal and state funding would yield important benefits if allocated toward helping colleges build greater data capacity and by adjusting funding models to prioritize and reward longer-term outcomes like retention and completion (Davidson, Ashby-King, & Sciulli, 2020). As seen in this study, data are integral to community colleges recognizing where students are not succeeding, as well as pinpointing areas that college members need professional development so they are trained to meet their students' unique needs. Indian River and Pierce both were able to cultivate data capacity and data literacy internally and through partnerships with organizations like Achieving the Dream. To accelerate this process, states could support colleges by improving their data systems and planning for robust professional development for institutional researchers.

State system support to increase colleges' data capacity and literacy can take several forms. State systems can secure and allocate funding for colleges to participate in efforts like the Postsecondary Data Partnership (PDP) through the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). PDP provides colleges with advanced dashboards around early momentum metrics, or leading indicators that students are likely to graduate, and disaggregated outcomes data. State systems can also plan professional development, delivered by both internal researchers within the state and third parties with expertise in data systems. Coordinated professional development helps under-resourced and under-staffed colleges establish greater capacity without them separately incurring costs for similar needs pertaining to building data capacity (Gagliardi & Johnson, 2019).

Trustees can position colleges for transformational change and states can help colleges build the data capacity needed to guide transformational change, but funding models can incentivize a shift from enrollment to longer-term outcomes like retention and completion. The current full-time equivalent (FTE) funding model centers on enrollment toward the start of a semester (Goldstein, 2012). Enrollment is only one component of student success, though. This study has demonstrated that when transformational change occurs, community college students are able to advance from one semester to the next and persist to graduation. Federal and state funding models (e.g., performance-based funding and multiple measures) can incentivize colleges to help students choose and progress through a pathway, identify and reduce equity gaps over multiple academic years, and attain their intended credential (Koh et al, 2019).

### **Areas for Future Research**

This study has presented important insights into how community colleges undergo the transformational change process. The case study findings presented here are only from three community colleges, so the findings are not fully representative of all high-performing community colleges across the United States that have undergone transformational change. Other community colleges have been finalists for the Aspen Prize more than once (Broward College, Odessa College, Pasadena City College, San Jacinto College, and West Kentucky Community and Technical College, to name a few) and have important insights into the transformational change process to offer. Community colleges and districts have also been finalists for or winners of other nationally renowned awards like Achieving the Dream's Leah Meyer Austin Award and the Malcom Baldrige National Quality Award. Community college practitioners and researchers would benefit from additional research on how excellent community colleges have

achieved greater student outcomes and reduced if not closed equity gaps through transformational change.

Community college practitioners and researchers would also benefit from additional research how community colleges engage in sensemaking, as well as how culture changes amid transformational change and sensemaking. Culture appeared in the academic literature pertaining to transformational change, but it was not emphasized as critical to the extent that this study indicated. Fortunately, my use of sensemaking theory to guide the study design created the space in interview protocols for study participants to think of and address culture in their responses. Future research would benefit from focusing more explicitly on culture from the outset. It is possible that what culture did for the community colleges in this study, organizational structure, governance, or external mandates might do for other community colleges. The results of this study, however, indicate culture should be at the forefront of future research on transformational change at community colleges.

Additional research on the transformational change process is needed not only on community colleges that have successfully undergone change but also those just embarking on or in the midst of the change process. The triangulation I performed with the various data I collected allowed for an accurate reconstruction of the transformational change process at the three community colleges participating in this study. Because the interview data were retroactive and reflective, they did not capture the organizational, sociological, and political nuances of change and sensemaking as they are happening. Longitudinal ethnographies and case studies of the transformational change process spanning as wide a range of years as possible would lead to important insights not within the data collected for this study: how transformational change is experienced at all levels of a community college, including how board members, students, and

community members experience this change; what causes transformational change to be derailed and key warning indicators that the change process is in danger; how team structures and communication strategies evolve over time; and more. The literature on transformational change at community colleges needs to capture change as it is occurring and retrospective looks at what made the change process successful.

### **Conclusion**

This study has shown that transformational change at community colleges is difficult, takes years to undergo, requires strong leadership and resources, and necessitates a cultural shift that centers on student success. For community colleges, to commit to transformational change entails developing an evidence-based culture, cultivating equity-mindedness and confronting white supremacy and systemic injustices in higher education, and centers decision-making at all levels (from trustee governance to classified staff professional and faculty engagement with students on a regular basis) on student success. In short, transformational change is profoundly challenging and beckons a paradigm shift for community colleges. But it has a positive impact across the board, not just for students but also for college members, the institutional culture, and the community at large.

## References

- 2019-2020. *Pierce College District*. Retrieved from <https://tableau.pierce.ctc.edu/views/QuickFacts/QuickFacts?iid=1&isGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&embed=y>
- The 2019 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. *College Excellence Program (The Aspen Institute)*. Retrieved from [https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2019/04/2019\\_Aspen\\_Prize\\_for-posting.pdf?\\_ga=2.145358578.759758337.1559696972-1640821578.1559558834](https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2019/04/2019_Aspen_Prize_for-posting.pdf?_ga=2.145358578.759758337.1559696972-1640821578.1559558834)
- About. (n.d.). *Quality Matters*. Retrieved from <https://www.qualitymatters.org/why-quality-matters/about-qm>
- Ackerman Anderson, L. S., & Anderson, D. (2010). *The change leader's roadmap: How to navigate your organization's transformation* (2nd ed). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Adelman, C. (2006). The toolbox revisited: Paths to degree completion from high school through college. *US Department of Education*.
- Akers, B., & Chingos, M. M. (2016). *Game of loans: The rhetoric and reality of student debt*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP.
- Alemán, S. M. (2018). Mapping intersectionality and Latina/o and Chicana/o students along educational frameworks of power. *Review of Research in Education*, 42(1), 177-202. doi:10.3102/0091732X18763339
- Altmann, J. (1974). Observational study of behavior: Sampling methods. *Behavior*, 49(3-4), 227-266. doi:10.1163/156853974X00534

- Amarillo College. (2019). *2019 Leah Meyer Austin Award (Achieving the Dream)*. Retrieved from <https://www.achievingthedream.org/resource/17623/2019-leah-meyer-austin-award-amarillo-college>
- Amey, M. J., Garza Mitchell, R. L., Rosales, J., & Giardello, K. J. (2020). Reconceptualizing midlevel leadership. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2020(191), 127-132. doi:10.1002/cc.20416
- Ashcraft, M., & Jacobsen, C. (2017). Planning at Mesa Community College: Integrated and informed for our improvement. *Planning for Higher Education*, 45(3), 130.
- Atkins, L., & Wallace, S. (2012). *Qualitative research in education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Averett, S., & Dalessandro, S. (2001). Racial and gender differences in the returns to 2-year and 4-year degrees. *Education Economics*, 9(3), 281-292. doi:10.1080/09645290110086144
- Ayers, D. F. (2005). Neoliberal ideology in community college mission statements: A critical discourse analysis. *Review of Higher Education*, 28(4), 527-549. doi:10.1353/rhe2005.0033.
- Ayers, D. F. (2011). Community colleges and the politics of sociospatial scale. *Higher Education*, 62(3), 303-314. 10.1007/s10734-010-9388-5
- Baer, L. L., & Duin, A. H. (2014). Retain your students: The analytics, policies and politics of reinvention strategies. *Planning for Higher Education*, 42(3), 30.
- Baer, L. L., Duin, A. H., & Bushway, D. (2015). Change agent leadership. *Planning for Higher Education*, 43(3), 1.
- Bailey, T. R., Jaggars, S. S., & Jenkins, D. (2015). *Redesigning America's community colleges: A clearer path to student success*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.

- Bailey, T., Jeong, D. W., & Cho, S. (2010). Referral, enrollment, and completion in developmental education sequences in community colleges. *Economics of Education Review*, 29(2), 255-270. doi:10.1016/j.econedurev.2009.09.002
- Baker, J. H., & Sax, C. L. (2012). Building a culture of evidence: A case study of a California community college. *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College*, 19(2), 47.
- Beach, J. M. (2012). *Gateway to opportunity?: A history of the community college in the United States*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Beckley, J. M. (2020). Leading and following: The Co-Construction of leadership. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2020(191), 57-66. doi:10.1002/cc.20406
- Belfield, C. R., Fink, J., & Jenkins, D. (2017). Is it really cheaper to start at a community college? The consequences of inefficient transfer for community college students seeking bachelor's degrees (CCRC Working Paper No. 94). *Community College Research Center (Teachers College, Columbia University)*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Bennis, W., Benne, K., & Chin, R. (1961). *The planning of change: Readings in the applied behavioral sciences*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.
- Benns-Owens, L. M. (2015). *Embracing future legacy: An intrinsic case study exploring Southern community college strategic efforts from a change response perspective* (Doctoral dissertation). Northeastern University, Boston, MA.
- Bensimon, E. M., & Dowd, A. (2009). Dimensions of the transfer choice gap: Experiences of Latina and Latino students who navigated transfer pathways. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(4), 632-659.

- Bergquist, W. H. (1992). *The four cultures of the academy: Insights and strategies for improving leadership in collegiate organizations*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Bess, J. L., & Dee, J. R. (2008). *Understanding college and university organization: Theories for effective policy and practice*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Birnbaum, R. (1988). *How colleges work: The cybernetics of academic organization and leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Boerner, H. (2016). Laying the groundwork. *Community College Journal*, 86(5), 26.
- Boggs, G. R., & McPhail, C. J. (2016). *Practical leadership in community colleges: Navigating today's challenges*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2013). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership* (5th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Bontrager, B., & Hossler, D. (2015). Understanding the context. In D. Hossler & B. Bontrager (eds.), *Handbook of strategic enrollment management* (pp. 18-30). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Bragg, D. D. (2017a). The case for evaluating student outcomes and equity gaps to improve pathways and programs of study. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2017(178), 55-66. doi:10.1002/cc.20253
- Bragg, D. D. (2017b). Transfer matters: Forward to the special issue on transfer. *Community College Review*, 45(4), 267-272. doi:10.1177/0091552117728572
- Bragg, D. D., & Durham, B. (2012). Perspectives on access and equity in the era of (community) college completion. *Community College Review*, 40(2), 106-125.
- Brekken, K., Bernick, E. L., Gourrier, A., & Kellogg, L. (2021;2019;). The people's college: A review of local community college governing boards through the lens of descriptive

- representation. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 45(1), 41-53.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2019.1640142>
- Brint, S., & Karabel, J. (1991). *The diverted dream: Community colleges and the promise of educational opportunity in America, 1900-1985*. New York, NY: Oxford UP.
- Brock, T., Mayer, A. K., & Rutschow, E. Z. (2016). Using research and evaluation to support comprehensive reform. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2016(176), 23-33.  
doi:10.1002/cc.20219
- Brown, S., Blount, S., Dickinson, C. A., Better, A., Vitullo, M. W., Tyler, D., & Kisielewski, M. (2016). Teaching for social justice: Motivations of community college faculty in sociology. *Teaching Sociology*, 44(4), 244-255. doi:10.1177/0092055X16665450
- Bryk, A S. et al. (2015). *Learning to improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Buller, J. L. (2015). *Change leadership in higher education: A practical guide to academic transformation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2015.
- Burns, B. (1996). *Managing change: A strategic approach to organizational dynamics*. London: Pitman.
- By, R. T. (2005). Organisational change management: A critical review. *Journal of Change Management*, 5(4), 369-380.
- Cabrera, N. L., Franklin, J. D., & Watson, J. S. (2016). Whiteness in higher education: The invisible missing link in diversity and racial analyses. *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 42(6), 7-125. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aehe.20116>
- Castro, E. L., & Cortez, E. (2017). Exploring the lived experiences and intersectionalities of Mexican community college transfer students: Qualitative insights toward expanding a

- transfer receptive culture. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 41(2), 77-92. doi:10.1080/10668926.2016.1158672
- Cejda, B. D., & Leist, J. (2013). Voices from the field: Learning about community college transformation and change from the words of practitioners. *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College*, 21(1), 15.
- Chase, M. M. (2016). Culture, politics, and policy interpretation: How practitioners make sense of a transfer policy in a 2-year college. *Educational Policy*, 30(7), 959-998. doi:10.1177/0895904814563382
- Chase, M. M., Dowd, A. C., Pazich, L. B., & Bensimon, E. M. (2014). Transfer equity for “Minoritized” students: A critical policy analysis of seven states. *Educational Policy*, 28(5), 669-717. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904812468227>
- Ching, C. D. (2017). Constructing and enacting equity at a community college (Doctoral dissertation). University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA.
- Christens, B. D., & Inzeo, P. T. (2015). Widening the view: Situating collective impact among frameworks for community-led change. *Community Development*, 46(4), 420-435. doi:10.1080/15575330.2015.1061680
- Chun, E., & Evans, A. (2018). *Leading a diversity culture shift in higher education: Comprehensive organizational learning strategies*. New York: Routledge.
- Clark, B. R. (1972). The organizational saga in higher education. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 17(2), 178-184.
- Cleary, J. L., Kerrigan, M. R., & Van Noy, M. (2017). Towards a new understanding of labor market alignment. In M. B. Paulsen (ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research*, 577-629. New York, NY: Springer.

- Coburn, C. E. (2001). Collective sensemaking about reading: How teachers mediate reading policy in their professional communities. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 23, 145-170.
- Cohen, L, Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2017). *Research methods in higher education* (8th ed). London: Routledge.
- Cohen-Vogel, L., Tichnor-Wagner, A., Allen, D., Harrison, C., Kainz, K., Socol, A. R., & Wang, Q. (2015). Implementing educational innovations at scale: Transforming researchers into continuous improvement scientists. *Educational Policy*, 29(1), 257-277.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904814560886>
- Collins, M., & Couturier, L. K. (2008). Achieving the Dream: State policy changes for community colleges. *The New England Journal of Higher Education*, 23(1), 14.
- Columbus State Community College. (2019). *2019 Leah Meyer Austin Award (Achieving the Dream)*. Retrieved from <https://www.achievingthedream.org/resource/17624/2019-leah-meyer-austin-award-columbus-state-community-college>
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2010). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2nd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Crisis and opportunity: Aligning the community college presidency with student success. (2013, June 13.) *The Aspen Institute*. Retrieved from [https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/files/content/docs/pubs/CEP\\_Final\\_Report.pdf?\\_ga=2.75160338.1259328205.1551835523-1077626165.1533741882](https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/files/content/docs/pubs/CEP_Final_Report.pdf?_ga=2.75160338.1259328205.1551835523-1077626165.1533741882)
- Crosta, P. M. (2014). Intensity and attachment: How the chaotic enrollment patterns of community college students relate to educational outcomes. *Community College Review*, 42(2), 118-142. doi:10.1177/0091552113518233

- Cuellar, M. G., & Gándara, P. (2021). Promoting access and equity for underrepresented racial minorities? an examination of policies and practices in community college baccalaureate programs. *Community College Review*, 49(1), 52-75.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552120964877>
- Damanpour, F., & Evan, W. (1984). Organizational innovation and performance: The problem of organizational lag. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 29, 392-409. doi:10.2307/2393031
- Davidson, C. T., Ashby-King, D. T., & Sciulli, L. J. (2020). The higher education funding revolution: An exploration of statewide community college "free tuition" programs. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 44(2), 117-132.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2018.1558135>
- Dejear, M. L., Jr, Chen, Y., Baber, L. D., & Li, R. (2018). Perceptions of data-driven decision making on student success: A study of culture, collaboration, and advocacy among community college leaders. *Community College Enterprise*, 24(1), 41-59.
- Denzin, N. K. (1997). *Interpretive ethnography: Ethnographic practices for the 21st century*. London: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K. (2001). *Interpretive interactionism*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K. (2014). Writing and/as analysis or performing the world. In U. Flick (ed), *The Sage handbook of qualitative data analysis*, pp. 569-585. London: Sage.
- Dey, I. (2007). Grounding categories. In A. Bryant & K. Charmaz (eds), *The SAGE handbook of grounded theory*, pp. 167-190. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- DiAngelo, R. (2018). *White fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

- Dick, B. (2007). What can grounded theorists and action researchers learn from each other? In A. Bryant & K. Charmaz (eds), *The SAGE handbook of grounded theory*, pp. 398-416. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dougherty, K. J. (1994). *The contradictory college: the conflict origins, impacts, and futures of the community college*. Albany, NY: SUNY.
- Dougherty, K. J., & Townsend, B. K. (2006). Community college missions: A theoretical and historical perspective. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2006(136), 5-13.  
doi:10.1002/cc.254
- Dowd, A. D., & Elmore, B. D. (2019). Leadership for equity-minded data use toward racial equity in higher education. In A. Kezar & J. Posselt (eds), *Higher education administration for social justice and equity: Critical perspectives for leadership*. Milton Park, UK: Taylor & Francis.
- Duncheon, J. C. (2015). The problem of college readiness. In W. G. Tierney & J. C. Duncheon (eds.), *The problem of college readiness* (pp. 3-44). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Eckel, P. D., & Couturier, L. (2006). *Toward higher ground: Reclaiming public confidence in a competitive environment*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.
- Eckel, P., Hill, B., & Green, M. (1998). *En route to transformation*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.
- Eckel, P. D., & Kezar, A. (2003). Key strategies for making new institutional sense: Ingredients to higher education transformation. *Higher Education Policy*, 16(1), 39;53;-53.  
doi:10.1057/palgrave.hep.8300001

- Eddy, P. L. (2003). Sensemaking on campus: How community college presidents frame change. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 27(6), 453-471.  
doi:10.1080/713838185
- Eddy, P. L. (2005). Framing the role of leader: How community college presidents construct their leadership. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 29(9-10), 705-727. doi:10.1080/10668920591006557
- Eddy, P. L. (2006). Nested leadership: The interpretation of organizational change in a multicollege system. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 30(1), 41-51.  
doi:10.1080/10668920500248878
- Eddy, P. L. (2010). Leaders as linchpins for framing meaning. *Community College Review*, 37(4), 313-332. doi:10.1177/0091552110362744
- Eddy, P. L., & Khwaja, T. (2019). What happened to re-visioning community college leadership? A 25-year retrospective. *Community College Review*, 47(1), 53-78.  
doi:10.1177/0091552118818742
- Edwards, A. F. (2017). Achieving gender equity for women leaders in community colleges through better communication. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2017(179), 23-34. 10.1002/cc.20259
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes* (2nd ed). Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P.
- Employee development program. (n.d.). *Indian River State College*. Retrieved from <https://www.irsc.edu/faculty-staff/employee-development-program.html#:~:text=The%20purpose%20of%20EDP%20is,Indian%20River%20State>

%20College%20employees.&text=This%20college%2Dwide%20initiative%20has,by%20transforming%20our%20College's%20culture.

- Fain, P. (2020, June 17). Higher education and work amid crisis. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/06/17/pandemic-has-worsened-equity-gaps-higher-education-and-work>
- Felix, E. R., Bensimon, E. M., Hanson, D., Gray, J., & Klingsmith, L. (2015). Developing agency for Equity-Minded change. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2015(172), 25-42. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20161>
- Felix, E. R., & Castro, M. F. (2018). Planning as strategy for improving black and latinx student equity: Lessons from nine California community colleges. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 26(56), 56. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.26.3223>
- Fong, C. J., Davis, C. W., Kim, Y., Kim, Y. W., Marriott, L., & Kim, S. (2017). Psychosocial factors and community college student success: A meta-analytic investigation. *Review of Educational Research*, 87(2), 388-424. doi:10.3102/0034654316653479
- Forsey, M. (2012). Interviewing individuals. In S. Delamont (Ed.), *Handbook of qualitative research in education*, (pp. 364-376). Cheltenham, Glos., GBR: Edward Elgar.
- Fusco, C. 'Naked truths? Ethnographic dilemmas of doing research on the body in social spaces. In K. Gallagher (ed), *The methodological dilemma: Creative, critical and collaborative approaches to qualitative research*, pp. 159-184. London: Routledge.
- Gagliardi, J. S., & Johnson, G. (2019). Transformational IR for student success. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2019(184), 91-103. doi:10.1002/ir.20324
- Gambino, L. M. (2017). Innovation in action: IPASS, student success, and transformative institutional change. *Planning for Higher Education*, 45(2), 65.

- Garcia, L. D. (2015). The early assessment program: Is early notification enough? In W. G. Tierney & J. C. Duncheon (eds.), *The problem of college readiness* (pp. 115-138). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Geertz, C. (1973). Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture. In C. Geertz (ed.), *The interpretation of culture: Selected essays*, 3-30. New York: Basic Books.
- Gist, C. D. (2014). The culturally responsive teacher educator. *The Teacher Educator*, 49(4), 265-283. doi:10.1080/08878730.2014.934129
- Glater, J. D. (2016). debt, merit, and equity in higher education access. *Law and Contemporary Problems*, 79(3), 89-112.
- Gluckman, N. (2017, March 29). For community college presidents, a challenging role yields high turnover. The Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/for-community-college-presidents-a-challenging-role-yields-high-turnover/>
- Goldfien, A. C., & Badway, N. N. (2015). Tempered radicals: Faculty leadership in interdisciplinary curricular change authors. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 39(4), 314-323. doi:10.1080/10668926.2014.981895
- Goldstein, L. (2012). *A guide to college and university budgeting: Foundations for institutional effectiveness*. Washington, DC: NACUBO.
- Grasmick, L., Davies, T. G., & Harbour, C. P. (2012). Participative leadership: Perspectives of community college presidents. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 36(2), 67-80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668920802421496>
- Hagedorn, L. S. (2015). A national initiative of teaching, researching, and dreaming: Community college faculty research in “Achieving the Dream” colleges: A national initiative of

- teaching, researching, and dreaming. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2015(171), 49-62. doi:10.1002/cc.20154
- Haley, K., McCambly, H., & Graham, R. D. (2018). Perceptions of student identities and institutional practices of intersectional programming. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 36(2), 32-47. doi:10.1353/csaj.2018.0014
- Hamilton, W. (2016). Framing vision: An examination of framing, sensegiving, and sensemaking during a change initiative. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 40(7), 625-631. doi:10.1080/10668926.2016.1138906
- Harper, S. R. (2012). Race without racism: How higher education researchers minimize racist institutional norms. *Review of Higher Education*, 36(1), 9-29.  
<https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2012.0047>
- Haycock, K. (2006). *Promise abandoned: How policy choices and institutional practices restrict college opportunities*. Washington, DC: The Education Trust.
- Hays, D. G., & Singh, A. A. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry in clinical and educational settings*. New York, NY: Guilford.
- Henwood, K., & Pidgeon, N. (2003). Grounded theory in psychological research. In P. M. Camic, J. E. Rhodes & L. Yardley (Eds), *Qualitative research in psychology: Expanding perspectives in methodology and design*, pp. 131-155. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Hern, K., & Snell, M. (2014). The California acceleration project: Reforming developmental education to increase student completion of College-Level math and English. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2014(167), 27-39. doi:10.1002/cc.20108

- Hlinka, K. R. (2017). Tailoring retention theories to meet the needs of rural Appalachian community college students. *Community College Review*, 45(2), 144-164.  
doi:10.1177/0091552116686403
- Hodara, M., & Jaggars, S. S. (2014). An examination of the impact of accelerating community college students' progression through developmental education. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 85(2), 246-276. doi:10.1080/00221546.2014.11777326
- Holistic student supports redesign: A toolkit. (2018). *Achieving the Dream*. Retrieved from <https://www.achievingthedream.org/resource/17502/holistic-student-supports-redesign-a-toolkit>
- Hood, J. C. (2007). Orthodoxy v. Power: The defining traits of grounded theory. In A. Bryant & K. Charmaz (eds), *The SAGE handbook of grounded theory*, pp. 151-164. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Holcombe, E., & Kezar, A. (2018). Mental models and implementing new faculty roles. *Innovative Higher Education*, 43(2), 91-106. doi:10.1007/s10755-017-9415-x
- Honda, H. (2018). Why do data and decision often disagree? analytical framework to facilitate organizational dynamics. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2018(178), 71-84. doi:10.1002/ir.20268
- Hossler, D. (2015). Trends in strategic enrollment management. In D. Hossler & B. Bontrager (eds.), *Handbook of strategic enrollment management* (pp. 549-564). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Jackson, J., & Kurlaender, M. (2014). College readiness and college completion at broad access four-year institutions. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 58(8), 947-971.  
doi:10.1177/0002764213515229

- Jaeger, A. J., Dunstan, S., Thornton, C., Rockenbach, A. B., Gayles, J. G., & Haley, K. J. (2013). Put theory into practice. *About Campus*, 17(6), 11-15. doi:10.1002/abc.21100
- Jenkins, D. (2007). Institutional effectiveness and student success: A study of high- and low-impact community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 31(12), 945-962. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03601270701632057>
- Jenkins, D., Lahr, H., Fink, J., & Ganga, E. (2018). What we are learning about guided pathways: Part 1: A Reform moves from theory to practice. *Community College Research Center (CCRC)*. Retrieved from <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/guided-pathways-part-1-theory-practice.pdf>
- Johnson, A., & Jones, S. J. (2018). An instrumental case study analysis of anticipatory leadership practices in community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 42(6), 389-404. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2017.1325418>
- Join us. (n.d.) *Achieving the Dream*. Retrieved from [https://www.achievingthedream.org/sites/default/files/basic\\_page/atd\\_the\\_solution.pdf](https://www.achievingthedream.org/sites/default/files/basic_page/atd_the_solution.pdf)
- Jones, S. R., Torres, V., & Armino, J. (2014). *Negotiating the complexities of qualitative research in higher education: Fundamental elements and issues* (2nd ed). New York: Routledge.
- Jones, W. A. (2013). The relationship between student body racial composition and the normative environment toward diversity at community colleges. *Community College Review*, 41(3), 249-265. 10.1177/0091552113497090

- Kadlec, A., & Rowlett, I. (2014). What we've learned about supporting faculty, administrator, and staff engagement. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 2014(167)*, 87-98.  
doi:10.1002/cc.20113
- Kalamkarian, H. S., Boynton, M., & Lopez, A. (2018). Redesigning advising with the help of technology: Early experiences of three institutions. *Community College Research Center (Teachers College, Columbia University)*. Retrieved from  
<https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/redesigning-advising-technology-three-institutions.html>
- Kaplan, R. S., Serafeim, G., & Tugendhat, E. (2018). Inclusive growth: Profitable strategies for tackling poverty and inequality. *Harvard Business Review, 96(1)*, 126-133.
- Keller, G. (1983). *Academic strategy: The management revolution in higher education*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP.
- Kezar, A. (2003). Enhancing innovative partnerships: Creating a change model for academic and student affairs collaboration. *Innovative Higher Education, 28(2)*, 137-156.  
doi:10.1023/B:IHIE.0000006289.31227.25
- Kezar, A. (2008). Understanding leadership strategies for addressing the politics of diversity. *The Journal of Higher Education, 79(4)*, 406-441. doi:10.1080/00221546.2008.11772109
- Kezar, A. (2009). Guest editorial. *Journal of Change Management, 9(3)*, 305.  
doi:10.1080/14697010903125522
- Kezar, A. (2011). What is the best way to achieve broader reach of improved practices in higher education? *Innovative Higher Education, 36(4)*, 235-247. doi:10.1007/s10755-011-9174-z

- Kezar, A. (2013). Understanding sensemaking/sensegiving in transformational change processes from the bottom up. *Higher Education*, 65(6), 761-780. doi:10.1007/s10734-012-9575-7
- Kezar, A. (2018). *How colleges change: Understanding, leading, and enacting change* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). New York: Routledge.
- Kezar, A. J., Carducci, R., & Contreras-McGavin, M. (2006). *Rethinking the "I" word in higher education: The revolution of research on literature*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Kezar, A., & Eckel, P. (2002a). Examining the institutional transformation process: The importance of sensemaking, interrelated strategies, and balance. *Research in Higher Education*, 43(3), 295-328. doi:10.1023/A:1014889001242
- Kezar, A., & Eckel, P. D. (2002). The effect of institutional culture on change strategies in higher education: Universal principles or culturally responsive concepts? *The Journal of Higher Education*, 73(4), 435-460. doi:10.1080/00221546.2002.11777159
- Kezar, A. J., & Elrod, S. L. (2015). Implicit theories of change as a barrier to change on college campuses: An examination of STEM reform. *The Review of Higher Education*, 38(4), 479-506. doi:10.1353/rhe.2015.0026
- Kezar, A. et al (2008). Creating a web of support: An important leadership strategy for advancing campus diversity. *Higher Education*, 55(1), 69-92. doi:10.1007/s10734-007-9068-2
- Kezar, A., Glenn, W. J., Lester, J., & Nakamoto, J. (2008). Examining organizational contextual features that affect implementation of equity initiatives. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 79(2), 125-159. doi:10.1080/00221546.2008.11772089

- Kezar, A., & Sam, C. (2014). Governance as a catalyst for policy change: Creating a contingent faculty friendly academy. *Educational Policy*, 28(3), 425-462.  
doi:10.1177/0895904812465112
- Klein, C. (2017). Negotiating cultural boundaries through collaboration: The roles of motivation, advocacy and process. *Innovative Higher Education*, 42(3), 253-267.  
doi:10.1007/s10755-016-9382-7
- Klempin, S., & Karp, M. M. (2018). Leadership for transformative change: Lessons from technology-mediated reform in broad-access colleges. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 89(1), 81-105. doi:10.1080/00221546.2017.1341754
- Knight, A. (2014). Excellence in community college student affairs. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2014(166), 5-12. doi:10.1002/cc.20096
- Koh, J. P., Katsinas, S. G., Bray, N. J., & Hardy, D. E. (2019). The “Double-Whammy”: How cuts in state appropriations and federal pell grants harm rural community college students and the institutions that serve them. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2019(187), 9-17. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20365>
- Kotter, J. P. (2012). *Leading change*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Kowal, S., & O'Connell, D. C. (2014). Transcription as a crucial step of data analysis. In U. Flick (ed), *The Sage handbook of qualitative data analysis*, pp. 64-79. London: Sage.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools. *Educational Researcher*, 35(7), 3-12.  
doi:10.3102/0013189X035007003
- Ladson-Billings, G. J., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record*, 97(1), 47-68.

LaManna, R. (2019). Assessment at an urban community college: From resistance to discovery.

*New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2019(186), 15-21.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20350>

Lather, P. (2007). *Getting lost: Feminist efforts toward a double(d) science*. Albany, NY: SUNY.

Lawton, J. (2018). Academic advising as a catalyst for equity. *New Directions for Higher*

*Education*, 2018(184), 33-43. doi:10.1002/he.20301

Leading internal transformational change (learning module). (n.d.). *College Excellence Program*

(*The Aspen Institute*). Retrieved from

<https://collegeexcellencecurriculum.aspeninstitute.org/module/leading-internal-transformational-change/>

Lebesch, A. M. (2012). Using labor market information in program development and evaluation.

*New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2012(153), 3-12. 10.1002/ir.20002

LeCompte, M. D., & Schensul, J. J. (2010). *Designing and conducting ethnographic research:*

*An introduction* (2nd ed). Lanham, MD: AltaMira.

Lester, J., & Kezar, A. J. (2012). Understanding the formation, functions, and challenges of

grassroots leadership teams. *Innovative Higher Education*, 37(2), 105-124.

doi:10.1007/s10755-011-9191-y

Levinson, D. L. (2005). *Community colleges*. Santa Barbara, CA ABC-CLIO.

Levy, A., & Merry, U. (1986). *Organizational transformation: Approaches, strategies, theories*.

New York: Praeger.

Lindblom, C. (1959). The science of muddling through. *Public Administration Review*, 19, 78-

88.

- Littlepage, B., Clark, T., Wilson, R., & Stout, L. (2018). Tennessee promise: A response to organizational change. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 42(6), 379-388. doi:10.1080/10668926.2017.1324826
- Lloyd, C. (2016). Leading across boundaries and silos in a single bound. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 40(7), 607-614. doi:10.1080/10668926.2015.1125816
- Locke, M. G., & Guglielmino, L. (2006). The influence of subcultures on planned change in a community college. *Community College Review*, 34(2), 108-127.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552106292518>
- López, O. S. (2014). Beyond community college accountability: Using data to investigate best practices for institutional improvement. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 38(1), 86-90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2012.762592>
- MacMillan, D. (2015). Developing data literacy competencies to enhance faculty collaborations. *LIBER Quarterly*, 24(3), 140-160. doi:10.18352/lq.9868
- Madison, D. S. (2005). *Critical ethnography: Methods, ethics and performance*. London: Sage.
- Magloire, J. (2019). Who wants to teach a diverse student body? community college missions and the faculty search committee. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 43(3), 165-172. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2018.1424666>
- Mangan, K. (2019, February 18.) To help students, colleges are dropping remedial courses. Will that backfire? *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/Trend19-Remediation-Main>
- Manning, T. M. (2011). Institutional effectiveness as process and practice in the american community college. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2011(153), 13-21.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.433>

- Martin, J. (1992). *Cultures in organizations: Three perspectives*. New York: Oxford UP.
- Martinez, E. (2018). Changes, challenges, and opportunities for student services at one baccalaureate Degree–Granting community college. *Community College Review*, 46(1), 82-103. doi:10.1177/0091552117744049
- Mazoué, J. G. (2012). The deconstructed campus. *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*, 24(2), 74-95. 10.1007/s12528-012-9054-2
- McCambly, H. N., & Haley, K. J. (2016). Equity and the "B" word: Budgeting and professional capacity in student affairs. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 53(2), 205. doi:10.1080/19496591.2016.1147358
- McDougal, S., Cox, W., Dorley, T., & Wodaje, H. (2018). Black student engagement: Resilience & success under duress. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 12(7), 192-215.
- McKenzie, L. (2020, June 2). Calls for change. *Inside Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/06/02/higher-ed-leaders-address-protests-racial-tensions-and-killing-george-floyd>
- McNair, D. E. (2015). Deliberate disequilibrium: Preparing for a community college presidency. *Community College Review*, 43(1), 72-88. doi:10.1177/0091552114554831
- Mellow, G. O., & Talmadge, R. A. (2005). Creating the resilient community college. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 37(3), 58-66. doi:10.3200/CHNG.37.3.58-66
- Merisotis, J. (2015). *America needs talent: Attracting, educating & deploying the 21st-century workforce*. New York: RosettaBooks.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Miller, M. (2014). *Minds online: Teaching effectively with technology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.
- Mitchell, M., Leachman, M., & Masterson, K. (2017, August 23). A lost decade in higher education funding state cuts have driven up tuition and reduced quality. *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/a-lost-decade-in-higher-education-funding>
- Mooney, R. (1963). Problem of leadership in the university. *Harvard Educational Review*, 33, 42-57.
- Moore, T. L. (2014). Community–University engagement: A process for building democratic communities. *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 40(2), 1-129. doi:10.1002/aehe.20014
- Morimoto, S. A., & Zajicek, A. (2014). Dismantling the 'master's house': Feminist reflections on institutional transformation. *Critical Sociology*, 40(1), 135. doi:10.1177/0896920512460063
- Nausieda, R. (2014). A framing primer for community college leaders. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 38(10), 917-926. doi:10.1080/10668926.2013.792300
- NC education boards endorse career and college readiness definition (2015, May.) *The Hunt Institute*. Retrieved from [http://www.hunt-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Did\\_You\\_Know\\_CareerCollegeReadinessDefinition\\_20150430.pdf](http://www.hunt-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Did_You_Know_CareerCollegeReadinessDefinition_20150430.pdf)
- Neuman, W. L. (2000). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (4th ed). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Norris, D., Brodnick, R., & Lefrere, P. (2013). *Transforming in an age of disruptive change*. Ann Arbor, MI: Society for College and University Planning.

- Orians, E. L., & Bergerson, A. A. (2014). Lessons learned: Mountain college in the midst of change. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, 17(3), 59-69.  
doi:10.1177/1555458914543374
- Palmadessa, A. L. (2017). America's college promise: Situating President Obama's initiative in the history of federal higher education aid and access policy. *Community College Review*, 45(1), 52-70. doi:10.1177/0091552116673710
- Parker, C., Morrell, C., Morrell, C., & Chang, L. (2016). Shifting understandings of community college faculty members: Results of an equity-focused professional development experience. *The Journal of Faculty Development*, 30(3), 41.
- Parsons, T. (1951). *The social system*. New York: Free Press.
- The path to completion: Nine colleges redesign for student success. (2017). *Completion by Design*. Retrieved from  
[https://www.completionbydesign.org/servlet/fileField?entityId=ka66A000000H009QAK&field=file1\\_\\_name\\_\\_s](https://www.completionbydesign.org/servlet/fileField?entityId=ka66A000000H009QAK&field=file1__name__s)
- Patton, L. D. (2016). Disrupting postsecondary prose: Toward a critical race theory of higher education. *Urban Education (Beverly Hills, Calif.)*, 51(3), 315-342. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085915602542>
- Patton, M. S. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Perna, L. W., Kvaal, J., & Ruiz, R. (2017). Understanding student debt: Implications for federal policy and future research. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 671(1), 270-286. 10.1177/0002716217704002

- Person, A. E., & Thibeault, N. (2016). Competency-Based programs as a lever for reforming core areas jointly. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2016(176), 79-87.  
doi:10.1002/cc.20225
- Phelan, D. J. (2015). *Unrelenting change, innovation, and risk: Forging the next generation of community colleges*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Phelan, D. J. (2021). *The community college board 2.0: Covenant governance*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Poindexter, S. (2003). The case for holistic learning. *Change*, 35(1), 24-30.
- Posselt, J., Hernandez, T. E., Villarreal, C. D., Rodgers, A. J., & Irwin, L. N. (2020). Evaluation and decision making in higher education: Toward equitable repertoires of faculty practice. (pp. 453-515). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-31365-4\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-31365-4_8)
- Price, P. D., Schneider, D. K., & Quick, L. A. (2016). Financial challenges in higher education: Community college leadership style and ranking. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 40(6), 508-522. doi:10.1080/10668926.2015.1069226
- Puchta, C., & Potter, J. (2003). *Focus group practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rajagopalan, N., & Spreitzer, G. M. (1996). Toward a theory of strategic change: A multi-lens perspective and integrated framework. *Academy of Management Review*, 22(1), 48-79.
- Rentsch, K. C. (2018). *Driving from the middle: The role of community college academic deans during periods of planned change*. Boston, MA, Northeastern University.
- Rhoades, R. A., & Valdez, R. (1996). *Democracy, multiculturalism, and the community college: A critical perspective*. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

- Rodicio, L., Mayer, S., & Jenkins, D. (2014). Strengthening program pathways through transformative change. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2014(167), 63-72.  
doi:10.1002/cc.20111
- Rodríguez, B. A. (2015). The challenge of the least ready: A historical perspective. In W. G. Tierney & J. C. Duncheon (eds.), *The problem of college readiness* (pp. 65-85). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Rodriguez, F. C. (2015). Why diversity and equity matter: Reflections from a community college president. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2015(172), 15-24.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20160>
- Roksa, J., & Keith, B. (2008). Credits, time, and attainment: Articulation policies and success after transfer. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 30(3), 236-254.
- Rosenbaum, J. E., Ahearn, C. E., Rosenbaum, J. E., & Gamoran, A. (2017). *Bridging the gaps: College pathways to student success*. New York City, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Rothwell, W. J., Gerity, P. E., & Carray, V. L. (2017). *Community college leaders on workforce development: Opinions, observations, and future directions*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Rush, C. A. (2010). From strategic plan to sustainable program: One college's journey. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 34(11), 913-915.  
doi:10.1080/10668926.2010.509258
- Saldaña, J. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Santamaría, L. J. (2014). Critical change for the greater good: Multicultural perceptions in educational leadership toward social justice and equity. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 50(3), 347-391. doi:10.1177/0013161X13505287
- Saunders, R. P. (2016). *Implementation monitoring & process evaluation*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Schein, E. (1992). *Organizational culture and leadership* (2nd ed). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Shults, C. (2008). Making the case for a positive approach to improving organizational performance in higher education institutions: The community college abundance model. *Community College Review*, 36(2), 133-159. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552108324656>
- Senge, P. M. (2010). *The fifth discipline: The art & practice of the learning organization*. New York, NY: Doubleday Business.
- Shane, M. J., Carson, L., & Edwards, M. (2018). A case study in updating academic integrity policy and procedures. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2018(183), 83-93. doi:10.1002/cc.20320
- Shmulsky, S., & Gobbo, K. (2019). Autism support in a community college setting: Ideas from intersectionality. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 43(9), 648-652. doi:10.1080/10668926.2018.1522278
- Sidman-Taveau, R., & Hoffman, M. (2019). Making change for equity: An inquiry-based professional learning initiative. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 43(2), 122-145. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2018.1424665>

- Sink, Jr, D. W., & Jackson, K. L. (2002). successful community college campus-based partnerships. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 26(1), 35-46.  
doi:10.1080/106689202753364990
- Slantcheva-Durst, S. (2014). Shared leadership as an outcome of team processes: A case study. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 38(11), 1017-1029.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2012.727770>
- Smith, A. A. (2017, June 30). Training the community college leader. *Inside Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/06/30/nc-state-revamps-community-college-leadership-doctoral-degree>
- Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for educational research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8, 23-44.
- Spender, J.-C., & Grinner, P. (1995). Organizational renewal: Top management's role in a loosely coupled system. *Human Relations*, 48(8), 909-926.  
doi:10.1177/001872679504800805
- Spillane, J. P. (2000). Cognition and policy implementation: District policymakers and the reform of mathematics education. *Cognition and Instruction*, 18, 141-179.
- Stich, E. B. K. (2008). *Elements of successful community college organizational change: A meta-ethnographic analysis* (Doctoral dissertation). Capella University, Minneapolis, MN.
- Stout, K. A. (2016). Implementing comprehensive reform: Implications for practice. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2016(176), 99-107. doi:10.1002/cc.2022
- Stout, K. A. (2018). The urgent case: Focusing the next generation of community college redesign on teaching and learning. *Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research* (NC State University).

- Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Strickland-Davis, S., Kosloski, M., & Reed, P. A. (2020). The impact of professional development grounded in social learning on community college faculty efficacy. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 44(7), 492-507.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2019.1616006>
- Stover, J. (2017). There is no case for the humanities. *American Affairs*, 1(4), 210-224.
- Terosky, A. L. P., & Conway, K. (2020). Learning to change and changing to learn: Conceptions of teaching improvement through a faculty-centered lens. *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, April 2020 (pp. 403-452). Cham: Springer International Publishing. doi:10.1007/978-3-030-31365-4\_11
- Thayer, L. (1988). Leadership/communication: A critical review and a modest proposal. In G. M. Goldhaber & G. A. Barnett (eds), *Handbook of organizational communication*, pp. 231-263. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Thelin, J. R. (2019). *A history of higher education* (3rd ed). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP.
- Thomas, J. (1993). *Doing critical ethnography*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Thornberg, R., & Charmaz, K. (2014). Grounded theory and theoretical coding. In U Flick (ed), *The Sage handbook of qualitative data analysis*. London: Sage.
- Tierney, W. G. (2011). *Impact of culture on organizational decision-making: Theory and practice in higher education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Tirol-Carmody, K., Kardash, N., Chang, K., & Ecker-Lyster, M. (2020). Adopting an activity-based cost management model at A community college: A case study. *Community*

- College Journal of Research and Practice*, 44(7), 482-491.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2019.1616005>
- Toma, J. D. (2010). *Building organizational capacity: Strategic management in higher education*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP.
- Torres, V., Hagedorn, L. S., & Heacock, L. T. (2018). Closing the academic and equity gaps: How Achieving the Dream redefined assessment. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2018(177), 73-86. doi:10.1002/ir.20257
- Torres, V., Viterito, A., Heeter, A., Hernandez, E., Santiague, L., & Johnson, S. (2013). Sustaining opportunity in rural community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 37(1), 3-17. doi:10.1080/10668920903213040
- Townsend, B. K. (2001). Blurring the lines: Transforming terminal education to transfer education. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2001(115), 63-71. 10.1002/cc.31
- Tucker, M., Byrnes-Loinette, K., & Bodary, D. (2018). Articulating and utilizing communication student learning outcomes in community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 42(3), 218-221. doi:10.1080/10668926.2017.1289865
- Valentine, J. C., Konstantopoulos, S., & Goldrick-Rab, S. (2017). What happens to students placed into developmental education? A meta-analysis of regression discontinuity studies. *Review of Educational Research*, 87(4), 806-833.  
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654317709237>
- Viggiani, F. A., & Szczerbacki, D. (2015). Systemness: A case study. *Planning for Higher Education*, 44(1), 42.
- Weick, K. E. (1976). Educational organizations as loosely coupled systems. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 21(1), 1-19.

- Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Wellington, J. (2000). *Educational Research: Contemporary Issues and Practical Approaches*. London: Continuum.
- Welton, A. D., Owens, D. R., & Zamani-Gallaher, E. M. (2018). Anti-racist change: A conceptual framework for educational institutions to take systemic action. *Teachers College Record (1970)*, 120(14), 1-22.
- White, J. A., & Dache, A. (2020). "A lot of inner-city kids": How financial aid policies and practices reflect the social field of color-blind racism at a community college urban campus. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 44(1), 15-29.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2019.1649220>
- Willig, C. (2014). Interpretation and analysis. In U. Flick (ed), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis*, pp. 136-151. London: Sage.
- Wilson, D., & Lowry, K. M. (2017). One goal, two institutions: How a community college and 4-year university partner to bridge student college readiness gaps. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 41(4-5), 267-272.  
[doi:10.1080/10668926.2016.1251350](https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2016.1251350)
- Wyner, J. S. (2014). *What excellent community colleges do: Preparing all students for success*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Wyner, J., Deane, K., Jenkins, D., & Fink, J. (2016). The transfer playbook: Essential practices for two- and four-year colleges. *The Aspen Institute*. Retrieved from [https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2016/05/aspen-crc-transferplaybook\\_05-2016.pdf?\\_ga=2.238145988.51597592.1559558834-1640821578.1559558834](https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2016/05/aspen-crc-transferplaybook_05-2016.pdf?_ga=2.238145988.51597592.1559558834-1640821578.1559558834)

- Yob, I. M., et al. (2016). Curriculum alignment with a mission of social change in higher education. *Innovative Higher Education*, 41(3), 203-219. doi:10.1007/s10755-015-9344-5
- Zajda, J. (2008). Globalization, comparative education and policy research: equity and access issues. In J. Zadjia, L. Davies, & S. Majhanovich (eds.), *Comparative and global pedagogies*, 3-13. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands. 10.1007/978-1-4020-8349-5\_1
- Zaltman, G., & Duncan, R. (1977). *Strategies for planned change*. New York, NY: John Wiley.